



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER SHINZO ABE'S TWO  
ADMINISTRATIONS: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF  
DOMESTIC AND SECURITY POLICIES**

by

Dae Kyu Lee

December 2016

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Robert Weiner  
Tristan Mabry

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SUCCESSIONS AND FAILURES OF DOMESTIC AND SECURITY POLICIES**

Dae Kyu Lee  
Major, Republic of Korea Air Force  
B.A., National Defense Academy of Japan, 2003

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December 2016**

Approved by: Robert Weiner  
Thesis Advisor

Tristan Mabry  
Second Reader

Mohammed M. Hafez  
Chair, Department of National Security Affairs

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## **ABSTRACT**

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's two premierships were different from one another, with his second tenure proving to be relatively successful. This study compares the two Abe administrations, focusing on agenda setting, economic policy, election tactics, and security policy. It provides relevant explanations for Abe's political success in his second administration.

Abe's pragmatism in statecraft mainly originated from his own political experiences and was crucial for accumulating his political capital and realizing security policy. At the domestic level, political influence from former administrations, Abe's unrivaled political performance within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the weakness of opposition parties, and an economic downturn influenced his political dominance. Regionally, the stronger U.S.-Japan alliance and an increase in Japan's security concerns about China and North Korea supported the development of Abe's security agenda.

This analysis has implications for the future of Abe's normalization trajectory. Abe's dominance may continue; weak domestic checks and balances and the regional political situation are likely to remain the same. Abe's further success will ultimately depend on the outcome of his economic policy, which, in turn, may enable his efforts to amend the constitution so that Japan can maintain its own armed forces rather than a Self-Defense Force.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defense
BOJ	Bank of Japan
C4I	Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DP	Democratic Party
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
GNI	Gross National Income
GSOMIA	General Security of Military Information Agreement
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JIP	Japan Innovation Party
JSDF	Japanese Self-Defense Forces
KWP	Korea Worker's Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
NDPG	National Defense Programme Guidelines
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
PLA	People's Liberation Army
ROK	Republic of Korea
SCC	Security Consultative Committee
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USMC	United States Marine Corps

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, a strong revisionist, is changing fundamental security policy that has been maintained from the time of the “Yoshida Doctrine” that emerged after the Second World War. At the same time, he is the only prime minister since Prime Minister Yoshida who has led Japan for two non-consecutive terms. Abe’s achievements have been quite different between his first and second administrations. What factors have brought about the differences between the first and second Abe administrations? What has made Abe’s current government a comparative success, in contrast to the failure he experienced in his first term as Prime Minister? Comparing the first and second Abe administrations will reveal political dynamics that might help explain why he has been able to pursue revisionist security policies and whether he will continue to be able to do so.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The importance of this research is divided into two dimensions: mechanisms of Japanese domestic politics and implication of Abe’s shift in policy. There have been few academic efforts to compare the first and second Abe administrations. Although the second tenure of Abe’s term in office has not yet ended, it is obvious that the second term is relatively successful, unlike the first term in office. Unlike during the first tenure, the political coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komei Party has won multiple elections. They still maintain a majority in the congress, and the cabinet’s approval ratings are also high, even after passing a Collective Self-Defense bill that caused protest among the Japanese. Moreover, within the LDP, Abe established unparalleled political power extending to 2018 by being re-elected as the LDP president. Even though the political environment between Abe’s first and second administrations might be similar, comparing these two terms can reveal mechanisms of Japanese domestic politics, what Abe has learned from his failure, and what factors have made Abe

successful so far. Japanese political dynamics may be better understood by analyzing two terms in office with the same political principal but firmly different political outcomes.

At the same time, Japan is facing the increasing likelihood the Abe administration will reshape the grand strategy known as the Yoshida Doctrine that has been maintained since the end of the Second World War. Japanese security and foreign policy was defined by the Yoshida Doctrine under the 1955 System.<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Samuels evaluated Japan's grand strategy by saying, "Since the Cold War, Japan's long-established consensus on a grand strategy that privileges economic over military strength under a protective U.S. shield has been unraveling."<sup>2</sup> By signing the Security Treaty with the United States under Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, Japan could develop as a commercial state and achieve great economic power. The Yoshida Doctrine shaped Japan's grand strategy, formed by combining the two elements of Article 9 and the U.S.-Japan alliance, exquisitely.

Abe's vision for normalization is the central ideology of his plans to remodel Japan's future. Although the Yoshida Doctrine had achieved high growth and economic capability, this strategy is not a normal strategy in the eyes of Abe and his supporters because the Constitution was written by American occupiers. A goal of the normalization trajectory is rewriting Article 9 so that Japan can maintain its own armed forces, not the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. Abe argued that Japan's constitution should be revised for the state to play a more active role toward the world and emphasized this goal again to the Japanese by saying that "People of Japan, be confident!" in a speech to Parliament in 2015.<sup>3</sup>

Regardless of the debate about Japan's future, the Japanese normalization trajectory would have a great impact on the foreign countries of East Asia as well as the

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<sup>1</sup> The 1955 System is a name for Japan's unique party system from 1955 to 1993. In the 1955 System, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was dominant as a ruling party, and prime ministers elected from the LDP had a great role to shape Japan's security and foreign policy.

<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), ix.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Fackler, "Prime Minister Abe Appeals to Japanese on Pacifist Constitution," *The New York Times*, 12 February 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/13/world/asia/abe-makes-impassioned-appeal-to-change-constitution.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/13/world/asia/abe-makes-impassioned-appeal-to-change-constitution.html?_r=0).

Japanese. For China and South Korea, Japan's remilitarization is still a sensitive security concern. If Japan were successful in rearmament, a security issue that has not changed in the 70 years since the end of the Second World War will take on a different dimension, because Japan has two territorial disputes within the region: the Senkaku (Diaoyudao) Islands with China and Dok-do (Takeshima) Island with South Korea. As Japan's and China's relationship was worsening, the Collective Self-Defense bill passed. Abe is getting closer to his "beautiful country."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is meaningful to anticipate further movements of the Japanese normalization trajectory in the Abe administration and the role of Abe's revisionist security policies in achieving this trajectory.

### C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will look into sources that discuss Abe's personal characteristics and political background, distinguish the differences between his first and second terms in office, and also review several analytical articles about Prime Minister Abe.

Shinzo Abe is the first Prime Minister of Japan born after the Second World War. He is also one of the youngest and the most conservative prime ministers ever since the Second World War. These characteristics are related to his personal background. Abe comes from a politically noble family; three generations of his family are politicians, including Abe. It is well known to the public that Nobusuke Kishi, the former prime minister of Japan, is the father of Abe's mother. Abe reminisced about Kishi and his grandfather's influence on him in his book, *Toward a Beautiful Country*, as follows: "Some people used to point to my grandfather as a 'Class-A war criminal suspect,' and I felt strong repulsion. Because of that experience, I may have become emotionally

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Fackler, "Timing is Everything: Abe's Playbook for Military Normalization," *The Diplomat*, 1 July 2014. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/timing-is-everything-abes-playbook-for-military-normalization/>.

attached to ‘conservatism,’ on the contrary. Since my childhood, in my eyes, my grandfather was a sincere statesman who only thought about the future of this country.”<sup>5</sup>

This perspective of Abe’s is reflected in his political style, since Kishi was Abe’s political role model. Abe’s hawkish stance, handed down from Kishi, appealed to the public when diplomatic issues with North Korea occurred.<sup>6</sup> Under the Koizumi administration, Abe already commanded political popularity as a hardliner against North Korea for its abduction of Japanese. At the last stage of the Koizumi administration, Abe was the strongest candidate to become the next leader and called “post-Koizumi.” Abe succeeded Koizumi as prime minister of Japan in 2006.

The outcomes of the first Abe administration, however, did not match his keen enthusiasm. Although the first Abe administration started with high approval ratings of above 70 percent in September 2006, six months later in March 2007, cabinet approval ratings sharply dropped to 40 percent, before eventually reaching 24.3 percent.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Abe received a fatal blow as prime minister after a defeat in the Upper House election in 2007. His short term in office as Prime Minister prevented Abe from executing his diverse and bold policies: a revision of Article 9, defense, and security policy focusing on an expansion of self-defense rights, a revision of history textbooks (one of the most controversial issues), and economic policies to balance the budget. Abe surprised the public by announcing his intention to suddenly resign from office due to health problems. Another interpretation, however, is that a sudden drop in the approval of the cabinet forced Abe to resign. Abe’s resignation seemed to be critical for his political life to some extent, because no prime minister in Japan had ever taken power again after a first term, except Shigeru Yoshida.

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<sup>5</sup> Reiji Yoshida, “Formed in Childhood, Roots of Abe’s Conservatism Go Deep,” *The Japan Times*, 26 December 2012. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2012/12/26/national/formed-in-childhood-roots-of-abes-conservatism-go-deep#.V0O8OlcZnjA>; Shinzo Abe, *Utsukushii kuni e [Toward a Beautiful Country]*, (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 2006), 20–21.

<sup>6</sup> Bryan Walsh, “The Abe Enigma,” *Time*, September 11, 2006, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501060918-1533514,00.html>.

<sup>7</sup> “2007nen 8gatsu chosa” [2007 August Poll], *TV Asahi*, August 2007, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/200708/index.html>.

Several scholars have analyzed the reasons for the political weakness of Prime Minister Abe in his first term. These reasons include electoral system reform, several scandals in the cabinet, Abe's modest economic and welfare policies, and the rising strength of the DPJ. Pekkanen focuses on structural changes in Japanese politics after the 1990s. The change of the electoral system from a medium-sized electoral district system to a primarily single-member electoral district system in the 1990s brought about fundamental changes in Japan's politics. Pekkanen argues that while political factions had a decisive role under the 1955 System, these fundamental changes in the 1990s made the prime minister's leadership and the cabinet's influence central in Japanese politics.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, from the perspective of Pekkanen, several scandals among the first Abe administration's cabinet—resulting in five ministers resigning and one suicide—weakened Abe's leadership and created a sudden drop in the cabinet's approval ratings. This left a critical scar on Abe's political reputation.

The trend of weak factions and stronger prime minister and cabinet was also confirmed by a survey by Kim and Park. Kim and Park argue that Japanese political changes resulting from electoral reform have influenced the length of the prime minister's term in office.<sup>9</sup> Before reform, even when the approval of the cabinet was low, strong factional power could shape elections under the medium-sized electoral district system. After electoral reform, the advocacy of the prime minister and cabinet had a greater role to influence the elections. Since the LDP, the ruling party, often replaced the prime minister if his approval had fallen, the average length of a prime minister's term in office became relatively short after reform.<sup>10</sup> The survey shows that after reform, the people's approval of the cabinet became a key indicator of the political stability of the prime minister.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Pekkanen, "What Is Koizumi's Legacy? Evaluating Change in Fukuda's LDP," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Asia Program Special Report* 139 (January 2008): 8, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Japan\\_Political1.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Japan_Political1.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Sang-Joon Kim and Ho-Seong Park, "Political Change and the Terms of Prime Minister in Japan: From Political Faction to Support Rate," *The Korean Journal for Japanese Studies* 38 (2013): 128–9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 128–9.

Fujihira takes a policy-oriented perspective. Fujihira mentions Abe's own book, *Toward a Beautiful Country*, pointing out that, "Abe's core problem was the fundamental gap between its ideological ambition and the modesty of its economic and welfare policy record."<sup>12</sup> During his first tenure, few economic policies existed to distinguish Abe from Koizumi. Abe's policy priorities were "education, defense, and constitutional reform," while the top priorities of the majority of Japanese were welfare and economic issues such as social security reform and job creation.<sup>13</sup> In other words, Abe's policies did not reflect what the public wanted.

Saito considers the political environmental dimension, focusing on the competition for political power between parties.<sup>14</sup> Saito emphasizes, especially, the influence of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which was the main opposition party in Japan. In the 2007 Upper House election, the DPJ defeated the coalition of the LDP and the Komei Party and became a majority in the Upper House for the first time; on the other hand, the LDP lost control of both houses for the first time in history.<sup>15</sup> According to Saito, the DPJ was well-situated to compete against the coalition of the LDP and the Komei Party and performed better in the election than the LDP.<sup>16</sup> Putting it differently, this revealed that the coalition of the LDP and the Komei Party would be "insuperable."<sup>17</sup>

These factors stated above are important not only for understanding how people analyze Abe's failure but also for understanding what areas have been changed in the second term from his experiences. In the 2012 general election, Abe came back by defeating the DPJ, which had achieved historical regime change in 2009. More surprisingly, the second Abe administration also started with a high cabinet approval of

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<sup>12</sup> Shinju Fujihira, "Legacies of the Abe Administration," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Asia Program Special Report* 139 (January 2008): 13, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Japan\\_Political1.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Japan_Political1.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>14</sup> Jun Saito, "The Democratic Party of Japan and Japan's Future," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Asia Program Special Report* 139 (January 2008): 15, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Japan\\_Political1.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Japan_Political1.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 16.



62.4 percent, as good as the former administration's. Unlike Abe's first administration, cabinet approval above 45 percent was maintained until the first half of 2015. After Abe returned, what happened?

Abe hinted at several changes in an interview with *Foreign Affairs*. He confessed to the failure of his first tenure as prime minister as follows: "When I served as prime minister last time, I failed to prioritize my agenda. I was eager to complete everything at once, and ended my administration in failure."<sup>18</sup> As mentioned above, Abe's policy priorities were ideological issues such as patriotic education, defense and constitutional reform of Article 9. While these issues might be important to Abe and his supporting groups, they leaned toward overly conservative agendas that were also not familiar to the ordinary Japanese.

In his tenure, Abe changed his agendas and top priorities from ideological issues to public welfare and more concern for the stabilization of the people's livelihood. He stated in the interview:

After resigning, for six years I traveled across the nation simply to listen. Everywhere, I heard people suffering from having lost jobs due to lingering deflation and currency appreciation. Some had no hope for the future. So it followed naturally that my second administration should prioritize getting rid of deflation and turning around the Japanese economy...Let's say that I have set the priorities right this time to reflect the concerns of the people, and the results are increasingly noticeable, which may explain the high approval ratings.<sup>19</sup>

Abe's efforts in his second tenure hit the mark for the Japanese. Based on the strong advocacy of the cabinet, Abe achieved several things that could not be accomplished during his first term in office: promoting a bold economic policy known as Abenomics, visiting the Yasukuni shrine in 2013, taking a hardline foreign affairs stance with respect to Northeast Asia, deciding to promote the right of collective self-defense through the cabinet's re-interpretation of Japan's Constitution, and guiding revision of a renewed school textbook.

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Tepperman, "Japan is Back: A Conversation with Shinzo Abe," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2013, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/interviews/2013-05-16/japan-back>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

One of the most significant differences between Abe's first and second administrations is that Abe is politically materializing his visions in the real world through a step-by-step process. As I mentioned above, however, academic surveys comparing Abe's two tenures are insufficient; many of the articles and surveys focus on the more controversial issues around Japan such as amendment of Article 9, possibility of normalization and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), and security and foreign policies of Japan. Therefore, more specific research is required to figure out reasonable explanations and find evidence about different outcomes of the two terms in office. This thesis will pursue the nature of Abe's successes and apply the implications to Japanese politics. Also, based on these findings, the research will predict the direction of the Abe administration.

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

This thesis contains several assumptions to explain what factors led to Abe's relatively successful outcomes during his second tenure compared to his first tenure. First, it is assumed that Abe's visions to reshape Japan into "a beautiful country" did not change during his terms in office. Abe's specific visions and beliefs were described well in his own book, *Toward a Beautiful Country*.<sup>20</sup> Second, as Pekkanen, Kim and Park argued earlier, the prime minister's leadership became more important in domestic politics than political factions' power. In other words, *kantei*-initiated politics (the office of the Prime Minister) is still valid and plays a significant role in Japanese politics. This trend was more conspicuous, particularly, after the Koizumi administration.<sup>21</sup> Third, following the second assumption, approval ratings of the cabinet and results of elections are important political indicators for prime ministers to evaluate the political stability of the regime and whether more challenging policy enactments might be attempted.

Based on these assumptions, it is possible to establish the following three hypotheses: First, having learned lessons from his last tenure, Abe now uses several

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<sup>20</sup> Abe, *Utsukushii kuni e [Toward a Beautiful Country]*.

<sup>21</sup> Ikubo Kabashima and Gill Steel, "The Koizumi Revolution," *Political Science & Politics* 40 (January 2007): 79–84.

political strategies to ensure regime stability: agenda setting, economic policy, election tactics, and security policy. Having matured in his political experiences, Abe manages the approval ratings of the cabinet and elections to balance his hawkish behaviors and policies. Second, Abe's successful economic policy, Abenomics, has been a vital strategy to build political credibility among the public, and he is likely to continue to use economic policy in this way. Third, Abe takes advantage of internal and external political circumstances, such as shifting domestic party politics or a rising China, to advance his hawkish policies. Specific ideas and evidence to support these hypotheses follow.

Abe's use of several new strategies in his second term allowed him to maintain regime stability while deliberately progressing toward revisionist policies. Unlike the first term, during which Abe tried to complete all his hawkish visions at once, the second term started with his distinctive economic policy, as Abe revealed in the interview when he returned. Abenomics was the top priority among his policies. Economic issues were significant for the Japanese due to the long-term stagnation of the economy since the 1990s. If Abenomics provided for the Japanese by giving a positive image for the economy restoration, Abenomics could be a critical source of approval. Consequently, Abenomics appealed to the Japanese.<sup>22</sup>

Abe's political skills are also more mature than those of his last term. Abe's new strategy was continuously reflected in the 2013 Upper House election. Abe shouted a slogan of "economic revival" based on Abenomics, and it was successful. The LDP regained a majority by defeating the DPJ, which had had the majority since the 2007 election, and the Japanese gave Abe the power to control both houses. Interestingly, as soon as Abe achieved political stability, he visited the Yasukuni shrine for his first time as a prime minister.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, this shows that Abe considered a balance between hawkish behavior and political stability. It seemed to be a politically calculated procedure in advance.

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald L. Curtis, "Abe and the LDP Are Back. Now What?" *Ninth Annual Lecture on Japanese Politics*, Columbia University, 25 September 2013, <http://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/rfiles/japan/Gerald%20Curtis%20summary%20report.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Rupert Wingfield, "Japan PM Shinzo Abe Visits Yasukuni WW2 shrine" *BBC News*, 26 December 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25517205>.

In addition, internal and external political factors help Abe to have political strength and to execute revision plans toward Japanese normalization. For example, internally, the DPJ, because of its weak power, could not play an active role presenting checks and balances against Abe, even though Abe's policies for normalization were still controversial. Natural disasters like the Great East Japan Earthquake/tsunami/nuclear accident on March 11, 2011 disappointed the Japanese in government leadership under the DPJ due to poor responses, but strengthened people's concerns about national security.<sup>24</sup>

Externally, especially with respect to security, the threat of the Senkaku Islands conflict with rising China, and North Korea's nuclear weapons, help Abe to execute more conservative and hardline policies. Although the public protested the Collective Self-defense bill, it was passed by cabinet decision. Soon after, the cabinet recovered its approval ratings. Another factor promoting Abe's security policy was the U.S. confirmation of support of the Japanese government through the U.S.-Japan defense cooperation guidelines in 2015.<sup>25</sup> These internal and external factors provide the Abe administration opportunities by establishing a relatively favorable political environment compared to the first Abe administration.

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis will be organized around a comparative case study focused on the first and second Abe administrations. As a comparative case study, this research benefits from the uniqueness of Abe's administrations because no precedent exists in Japanese history in which the same person executed two non-consecutive terms as a prime minister and, at the same time, produced contrasting political outcomes.

Put simply, this research is looking for the answers about what happened between both tenures, what differences there are, and why those outcomes came about. To analyze

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce Klinger, "Fukushima Crisis Shows Weakness in Japanese Crisis Management," *Northeast Asia Asian Studies Center*, 12 October 2011, <http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2011/10/fukushima-crisis-shows-weakness-in-japanese-crisis-management>.

<sup>25</sup> Sheila A. Smith, "Reinterpreting Japan's Constitution," *Asia Unbound* (blog), 2 July 2014, <http://blogs.cfr.org/asia/2014/07/02/reinterpreting-japans-constitution/>.

these problems, I will examine several independent variables related to Prime Minister Abe's record of performance: political strategies, such as flexibility in policy prioritization, application, and timing; and the internal and external political environment.

First, political strategies of two tenures are compared in order of the following sub-variables: agenda setting, economic policy, election tactics, and security policy. Each sub-variable is evaluated by matching political indicators such as approval ratings of cabinet and election results. The economic policy section in the second term will be focused on Abenomics. The second and third independent variables are more focused on the second tenure. By analyzing how Abe executed modest policies and hawkish policies and under what conditions, I will determine the specific correlation between political indicators and policy execution. Furthermore, I will examine how Abe exploits the domestic and international political environments for his hawkish policies.

Finally, this thesis will review the existing literature (official publications such as government documents and statistical sources, scholarly books, articles written by industry experts, and blogs from credible analysts) to ensure analytic breadth and propose convincing explanations to these major research questions.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW AND DRAFT CHAPTER OUTLINE**

Following the introduction of this thesis, Chapter II will compare Abe's political policies during the two tenures: agenda setting, economic policy, election tactics, and security policy. The major policy differences will be found in Chapter II. Chapter III will explore more specific correlations between Abe's political style and political indicators during Abe's first and second terms in office. This will reveal how Abe's political strategy connects to his regime stability in his second term. Chapter IV and V will examine how political circumstances influence Abe's policies and contribute to regime stability. The conclusion, Chapter VI, will answer the research question posed in the introduction chapter and provide implications for Japanese politics generally, as well as for revisionist security policies.

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## **II. COMPARING ABE'S TWO TENURES**

Shinzo Abe is one of the most unusual politicians in Japan because he was elected as a leader of the state in two non-consecutive terms. The first term in office was relatively short, from 2006 to 2007. Abe was back in 2012 and gained a second opportunity to serve as a prime minister. His second tenure continues at the time of this writing, and his approval rating does not seem to be a direct threat to his office. This chapter compares Abe's policies between the first and the second administration and identifies major differences reflecting what he has learned. This chapter will explore how the changes between Abe's first and second administration can be understood through four intertwining themes: agenda setting, economic policy, election tactics, and security policy. For analysis, this section will focus on those four parts in terms of a comparative research scope. Comparison of each of these themes between the two terms in office will reveal the political lessons that Abe has learned from the last administration's failure, Abe's political strategy to manage state affairs of the second tenure, and features of current Japanese political dynamics.

### **A. AGENDA SETTING**

Abe put different points on his agendas between his two terms in office. While Abe emphasized ideological issues to the Japanese people in the first tenure, he turned to a more pragmatic position in the second term calling for economic revival.

#### **1. Abe's First Tenure**

Abe had been appointed to the LDP presidency in September 2006. By winning a presidential election of the LDP, Abe became the successor to Prime Minister Koizumi. Koizumi served in office from 2001 to 2006, maintaining high popularity during his tenure. Koizumi is often evaluated as one of the most successful Prime Ministers in Japan for pushing economic reforms, including the privatization of the Japanese postal service and government debt.<sup>26</sup> Abe also enjoyed the confidence of the Japanese people as a

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<sup>26</sup> Kabashima and Steel, "The Koizumi Revolution," 79–84.

member of the Koizumi Cabinet. It was well known to the public that Abe, a chief negotiator of the Cabinet, played an active part in receiving Kim Jong-il's apology for the Japanese abduction issue at the 2002 Japan-North Korea summit.<sup>27</sup> With great expectations, the first Abe administration started.

Abe's main agenda as a prime minister was to deal with ideological discourse. On 29 September 2006, through the first policy speech in the 165th session of the Diet, Abe addressed "a beautiful country" as a vision of the Prime Minister. In the speech, Abe described "a beautiful country" as follows.

Firstly, "a beautiful country, Japan" is a country that values culture, tradition, history, and nature. Secondly, "a beautiful country, Japan" is a country underpinned by free society, respects discipline, and has dignity. Thirdly, "a beautiful country, Japan" is a country that continues to possess the vitality to grow toward the future. And fourthly, "a beautiful country, Japan" is a country that is trusted, respected, and loved in the world, and which demonstrates leadership.<sup>28</sup>

Discourse of "a beautiful country" was close Abe's political philosophy that he had long maintained as a politician. Abe is known as the first Prime Minister born in the postwar period and also as the youngest national leader after the end of the Second World War. Abe regarded Japan's current image as abnormal. In his book, *Toward a Beautiful Country*, Abe expressed his regret that Japanese were used to taking a passive stance due to their concerns about their historical legacy in the past whenever any present-day troubles occurred among countries.<sup>29</sup> Also, Abe stressed that Japanese should be proud that Japan has devoted itself to protect freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law, as well as contributing to the world in diverse ways in the 60 years since the end of the Second World War.<sup>30</sup> Abe seemed to have a strong belief that changing the Japanese self-image from being past-oriented to future-oriented was his duty.

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<sup>27</sup> Wada Haruki, "Kim Jong-il and the Normalization of Japan-North Korea Relations," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 10, issue 9 (FEB 2012), <http://apjif.org/2012/10/9/Wada-Haruki/3699/article.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Shinzo Abe, "Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 165th Session of the Diet," (speech, the 165th Session of the Diet, 29 September 2006), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/abespeech/2006/09/29speech\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/abespeech/2006/09/29speech_e.html).

<sup>29</sup> Abe, *Utsukushii kuni e [Toward a Beautiful Country]*, 150.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



This ideological agenda was reflected through education reform. Abe wanted to rebuild education in order to realize his goal of “a beautiful country” for the young generation.<sup>31</sup> Abe appealed to the public for support of the early enactment of the new education bill, and finally a revised Fundamental Law of Education was passed, the so-called “patriotic education law,” on 22 December 2006. Additionally, Abe set agendas to introduce diverse policies of the new government such as economy policy, “healthy and safe society,” and “shift to proactive diplomacy.”<sup>32</sup> Even in those policies, Abe linked between the “a beautiful country” metaphor and his design of state. For example, Abe indirectly emphasized a new state identity, a revision of the Constitution and collective self-defense using the “a beautiful country” discourse. By setting these agendas, Abe implied that his strong ideologically-colored policies would be propelled in the first administration.

## **2. Abe’s Second Tenure**

When Abe returned to office for the second time as Prime Minister, he brought a more pragmatic agenda. During the governing by the DPJ over three years, the Japanese public was frustrated by poor state management and a continuous economic recession.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the campaign of the 2012 general election, Abe strongly pledged himself to build an economic restoration. The economy issue leaped into the top priority of the second tenure of the Abe administration after the LDP regained power.

On 26 December 2012, at the first press conference after Abe was designated the 96th Japanese Prime Minister, he clarified his economic revival plan to the public. Abe declared that defining the revival of the current economy was an urgent issue, and that the first mission of the Cabinet was to restore a robust economy.<sup>34</sup> Repeatedly, Abe proposed three specific economic policies known as “three arrows,” or collectively as

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<sup>31</sup> Abe, “Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 165th Session of the Diet.”

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Michael J. Green, “US-Japan Relations: Meet the New Boss/Same as the Old Boss?” *Comparative Connections* 14.3 (Jan 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Shinzo Abe, “Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” (speech, the press conference, 26 December 2012), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201212/26kaiken\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201212/26kaiken_e.html).

“Abenomics,” the major economic policy of the second Abe administration. The three arrows were monetary policy, fiscal policy, and structural reform that promote private sector investment.<sup>35</sup>

Officially, Abe set economic revival as a top priority of the Cabinet, and set the three specific economic policies at the first press conference after the Prime Minister Inauguration. Considering that the policies he presented were not simple policies, Abenomics had to have been prepared well in advance: Abe had been making plans about economic policy. In this sense, Abenomics had to be the main factor to determine his path through his second tenure. In retrospect, Abe’s strategic choice played a significant role to lay the foundation of political stability in his term in office by evoking for the Japanese people a sense of economic expectations. Economic policy was given a more important role than during Abe’s first term in office.

Comparing the primary policies of the two tenures, they look quite different. Ideological issues were the top priority policy in the first tenure, but during the second tenure, the priority of the agenda had been changed to more pragmatic issues concerning economic restoration. This is probably due to Abe’s failures during his first tenure, which he had time to review while out of office over the five years afterwards. This process can be inferred from an Abe interview: Abe looked back on what he had learned from the last administration by saying that “Six years ago, I had only just turned 52, so I was younger than I am now and on fire with ideals, but it is also true that I was excessively eager to realize my ideas.”<sup>36</sup> Considering this statement, Abe seems to have learned a lesson from his past management of state affairs.

Other policies were sketched, but those were mostly secondary before the LDP secured the majority of both Houses of the Diet. Although the LDP achieved a majority in the Lower House in the prior 2012 general election, the DPJ still maintained a majority in the Upper House. Other key issues for Abe included the energy issue, especially use of nuclear power; security issues such as the National Defense Program Guidelines and

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<sup>35</sup> Abe, “Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Midterm Defense Plan distributed by the DPJ; and re-interpreting the Japanese Constitution to enable the collective self-defense.<sup>37</sup> To secure those policies, Abe and the LDP had to anticipate the result of the Upper House election in July 2013. Therefore, a trajectory and a success of Abenomics was significant to both Abe and the LDP.

## **B. ECONOMIC POLICY**

Although Japanese people regarded a better economy as a significant part of their living standards, Prime Minister Abe had a huge gap in commitment toward the economy between the two tenures. In the first tenure, the Japanese public was disappointed in Abe's relatively little concern toward the economy and pension scandal. In the second tenure, however, economic policy contributed to political stability since Abe propelled Abenomics, his main economic policy, as a top priority agenda. This section will briefly compare economic policy between both tenures and mainly examine Abenomics and its implications for the second Abe administration.

### **1. Abe's First Tenure**

The Japanese public was highly concerned about the economy. Former Prime Minister Koizumi drove strong economic reform, including postal service privatization, which replaced the government-owned old Postal Services Agency with full private postal service companies. This economic reform was widely supported by the Japanese public because the majority of the proponents believed that the old postal service was one of huge sources to cause economic corruption. They stressed that postal privatization would allow Japan's economy to foster economic efficiency and flexibility and would help the nation escape its endemic economic stagnation since the 1990s. Koizumi's postal privatization bill finally passed through support from the public, which led to a LDP win in the general election of September 2005.

Japanese expectations toward economic reform continued with a new prime minister, Abe, who was a successor to Koizumi. Through the government-initiated extensive economic reform, the Japanese public looked forward to upgrading their living

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<sup>37</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Back on Track," *Comparative Connections* 15.1 (May 2013).

standard. According to the Japanese public opinion conducted by Asahi TV station on 27–28 September 2006, almost half of the Japanese public had expected that the new Abe administration would continue to accelerate Koizumi's economic reform mood (47 percent positive for economic reform, 21 percent negative, 32 percent no response).<sup>38</sup>

During his first tenure, however, Abe did not satisfy the public's desire for economic reform because Abe and the LDP, the ruling party, clearly showed little commitment to economic reform. For instance, politicians who were against Koizumi's economic reform agenda came back to the LDP.<sup>39</sup> Abe allowed the purged LDP politicians to return because Abe believed that a return of those members would be helpful to win the Upper House election.<sup>40</sup> This angered the public, however. According to a poll on 2–3 December 2006, 66 percent of the Japanese public criticized the LDP's decision to allow those political defectors against Koizumi economic reform to return to the LDP.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, 80 percent of the Japanese people thought that Prime Minister Abe had not provided sufficient explanation for purged members rejoining the party.<sup>42</sup> The public asked Abe to accelerate Koizumi's economic reform. Consequently, the LDP failed to win the 2007 Upper House election, and Abe also failed to hold people's support for the cabinet.

In May 2007, the major opposition party, the DPJ, revealed that the Social Insurance Agency had lost 50 million records of individual pension payers.<sup>43</sup> As a result, a pension scandal directly crippled the first Abe administration. Although this scandal happened well before Abe became prime minister, it was enough to negatively impact his administration. Regarding the pension scandal, the Japanese people were disappointed

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<sup>38</sup> "2006nen 9gatsu chosa" [2006 September Poll], *TV Asahi*, September 2006, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/200609/index.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Fujihira, "Legacies of the Abe Administration," 12.

<sup>40</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: An Unexpected Rough Patch," *Comparative Connections* 9.1 (April 2007).

<sup>41</sup> "2006nen 12gatsu chosa" [2006 December Poll], *TV Asahi*, December 2006, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/200612/index.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Harukata Takenaka, "Party Politics and Leadership Change in Japan: The Prime Ministerial Relay," in *Looking for Leadership: The Dilemma of Political Leadership in Japan*, ed. Ryo Sahashi et al. (New York: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2015), 58–9.

due to the irresponsibility of the government, and this anger was directly reflected in the falling approval rating of the cabinet. Compared to the high approval rating of over 70 percent at the beginning of September 2006, in June 2007, the approval rating of the Abe administration dropped to 33.5 percent.<sup>44</sup> It seemed doubtful that the public would recover their confidence in the cabinet.

Abe's strong enthusiasm for pushing an ideological agenda, discussed previously in this chapter, and relatively low economic concerns undermined his commitment to economic reform in a short period of the first administration. A sudden drop of domestic approval ratings of the cabinet in 2007 and Abe's health problems stopped further opportunities promote an economic agenda.

## **2. Abe's Second Tenure**

When Abe was back in the cabinet in December 2012, he introduced Abenomics as a core strategy to achieve a new economic revival and end the stagnation of the past two decades. Abe's strong pledge focused on revitalizing the Japanese economy and raising people's living standards. As stated earlier in the chapter, Abenomics composed three specific main policies called "three arrows." The first arrow, the aggressive monetary policy, proposed to improve the stock market by aiding intensive quantitative easing, at the same time to increase trade benefits by suppressing the currency value.<sup>45</sup> In particular, through intimate cooperation between the cabinet and Bank of Japan (BOJ), the cabinet intended to provide the market with persistent quantitative easing and to achieve 2 percent inflation as well. Flexible fiscal policy, the second arrow, was a plan of reflationary measures by extensive governmental expenditure. Abe pushed a bold stimulus package on infrastructure projects for economic revival. The last arrow, a growth strategy, referred to induce growth potential through structural reform and growth industries such as transforming agriculture and expanding the workforce for women.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "2007nen 6gatsu chosa" [2007 June Poll], *TV Asahi*, June 2007, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/200706/index.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Looney, "Japan Economy," *Europa World Plus*, 2016, [www.europaworld.com](http://www.europaworld.com).

<sup>46</sup> Looney, "Japan Economy."

**a. Abenomics: Three Arrows**

The aggressive monetary policy, the heart of Abenomics, focused on creating sustained economic growth. On 20 March 2013, Abe appointed Haruhiko Kuroda as Governor of the BOJ. This was the first step to promote the first arrow because Kuroda was one of economic experts to support monetary easing. Kuroda revealed a plan to escape from endemic deflation by introducing quantitative and qualitative monetary easing in spring 2007. Its basic thinking was as follows: “The bank should do whatever is necessary to overcome deflation. It should strongly and clearly commit itself to the achievement of the price stability target of 2% as its responsibility. It should convey its strong policy stance with clarity and intelligibility. It should enter a new phase of monetary easing both in terms of quantity and quality in order to underpin its commitment.”<sup>47</sup> According to Robert Looney, the principles of Abenomics are straightforward.<sup>48</sup> Through monetary easing, nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and tax revenues will increase; then, real economic growth will decrease governmental expenditure following drop in unemployment and the need for social requirements; finally, this process enables the government financial status to be more in balance by eliminating an option of tax increase that could cause economic recession again.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, targeting inflation of 2 percent was a central concept for inducing domestic consumption because expectation of lower prices in the near future could postpone household consumption expenditures.<sup>50</sup> Under these mechanisms, the monetary plan aimed to support the success of Abenomics.

With the aggressive monetary policy, Abe also planned a large scale of government expenditure for economic restoration. On 11 January 2013, Abe announced a new fiscal policy known as *Emergency Economic Measures for The Revitalization of the*

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<sup>47</sup> Haruhiko Kuroda, “Quantitative and Qualitative Monetary Easing,” Speech at a Meeting Held by the Yomiuri International Economic Society in Tokyo, 12 April 2013, [http://www.boj.or.jp/en/announcements/press/koen\\_2013/data/ko130412a1.pdf](http://www.boj.or.jp/en/announcements/press/koen_2013/data/ko130412a1.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Looney, “Japan Economy.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

*Japanese Economy* at the Prime Minister Press Conference.<sup>51</sup> The cabinet decided to support three main areas on emergency economic stimulus measures with government expenditures totaling 10.3 trillion yen (U.S. \$101 billion). The fiscal policy identified three priority areas. First, “Reconstruction and Disaster Prevention” was planned for reconstruction of areas damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake and better natural disaster prevention (3.8 trillion yen). Second, “Creation of Wealth through Growth” stimulated private investment, small and medium-sized business, financial and capital markets, and human capital development and employment (3.1 trillion yen). Lastly, “Securing of Livelihood and Regional Vitalization” planned to ensure a sense of security in daily life and revitalize local areas through making use of their assets (3.1 trillion yen). Through these fiscal measures, the government expected economic impacts of a boost of 2 percent in the real GDP growth rate and the creation of approximately 600,000 new jobs.<sup>52</sup> Agile government expenditure reflected the strong intention of the cabinet to transform Japan’s depressed economic trends.

Growth strategy was the final goal to complete Abe’s revitalization strategy plan on the supports of the monetary and fiscal policies. The cabinet introduced a new growth strategy on 14 June 2013.<sup>53</sup> The Japan Revitalization Strategy was based on three programs: the revitalization of industry, strategic market creation, and global outreach strategy. These plans proposed to strengthen the industrial base by structural reform and technological innovations; turning challenges into new markets by enhancing market structure such as agriculture, energy and next-generation infrastructure; and tapping into expanding global markets by expanding global participation such as Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and infrastructure export. Through the growth strategy, Abenomics aimed to restore the confidence of people and companies in their perception of the economy, and to induce their positive action beyond economic expectation. The Abe

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<sup>51</sup> “Emergency Economic Measures for The Revitalization of the Japanese Economy,” The Cabinet Office, 11 January 2011, [http://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai1/2013/130111\\_emergency\\_economic\\_measures.pdf](http://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai1/2013/130111_emergency_economic_measures.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “Japan Revitalization Strategy: Japan is Back,” The Cabinet Office, 14 June 2013, [http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/keizaisaisei/pdf/en\\_saikou\\_jpn.pdf](http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/keizaisaisei/pdf/en_saikou_jpn.pdf).

administration ultimately declared that its objective of escaping from deflation and satisfying revitalization was to achieve “around 3% nominal gross domestic product (GDP) growth and around 2% real GDP growth, on average, over the next ten years.”<sup>54</sup> The cabinet expected to enhance standards of living by increasing the per capita nominal Gross National Income (GNI) over 1.5 million yen in ten years.<sup>55</sup> This was a basic concept of revitalization strategy and a roadmap to complete the third arrow, a growth strategy.

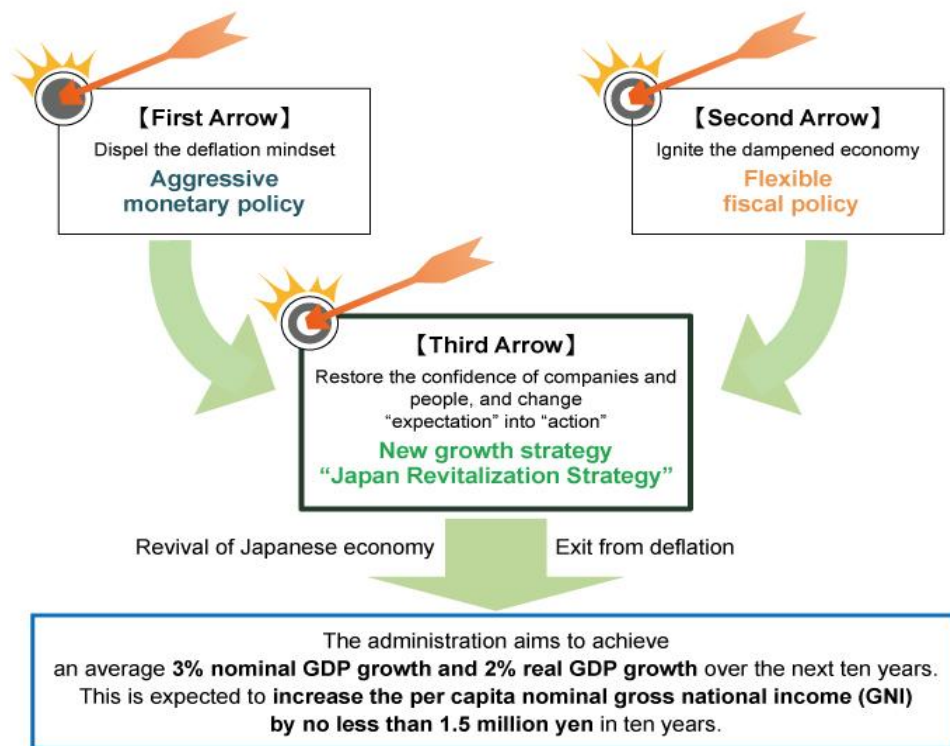


Figure 1. Three Arrows for Reviving the Japanese Economy<sup>56</sup>

Bold economic policy was pragmatic for the second Abe administration. Abe learned a lesson from his political experience in the first administration: if the government is not concerned enough with enhancing the living standard of the public, this could be critical for regime stability. Abe saw that the main reason for failure in his

<sup>54</sup> “Japan Revitalization Strategy: Japan is Back.”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Source from “Japan Revitalization Strategy: Japan is Back,” The Cabinet Office.



last administration was the low priority placed on the economic agenda.<sup>57</sup> In fact, Abe perceived that he had great capability to handle foreign affairs in the first administration.<sup>58</sup> Katz and Ennis stated that, having successfully handled diplomacy, Abe needed more proactive action to handle domestic affairs and economic achievement in order to recover the confidence of the Japanese people.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, the economic status of Japan had worsened before Abe was back in office in 2012. The Japanese economy still did not escape from long deflation after Abe resigned as prime minister. For instance, the global financial crisis in 2008–2009 confronted the Japanese with another economic challenge. In 2008, the Nikkei 225, the Nikkei Stock Average, declined over 40 percent, which caused a year-on-year decline of the GDP by almost 4 percent in the first quarter of 2009.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, on 11 March 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred even before the economic hardship of the global financial crisis had fully subsided. The Great Earthquake, accompanied by a large tsunami, damaged the Japanese people economically and psychologically. Japan's real GDP fell 2 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2011.<sup>61</sup> A number of people in the Northeastern region were suffering from having lost their economic living foundation. There seemed to be no hope for the Japanese people without a long-term master economic plan to escape deflation.

Even though Abe grasped the second opportunity to serve as a Prime Minister by winning the 2012 general election, an image of the failure in the last administration might have been left among the public. Thus, Abe needed political momentum to distinguish his new administration from the shadow of the first administration in order to recover his political image. Abenomics was one of the most appropriate options for Abe and the public. As the ruling DPJ leaders of the former administration showed incapacity in dealing with natural disaster, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and governing

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<sup>57</sup> Tepperman, "Japan is Back: A Conversation with Shinzo Abe."

<sup>58</sup> Richard Katz and Peter Ennis, "How Able Is Abe?" *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2007), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2007-03-01/how-able-abe>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Looney, "Japan Economy."

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

domestic affairs, the Japanese public wanted strong leadership with concrete policies. With a new and strong economic policy, unlike the first administration, Abe could live up to the Japanese public's expectation in the beginning of his second tenure as prime minister. Considering these factors, Abe stood to gain from creating political momentum in the new administration by setting Abenomics as a top priority.

#### **b. Economic Achievements and weaknesses of Abenomics**

Initial economic outcomes of the two arrows, aggressive monetary and flexible fiscal policies, demonstrated how Abenomics positively influenced the market. In the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Country Report in August 2013 for Japan, positive economic signals were shown in the first half of 2013:

From September 2012 to mid-May 2013, the Nikkei rose by about 80 percent, with large gains for export-oriented firms and financial institutions. The rise in the stock market occurred in tandem with the strong depreciation of the yen (down 17 percent in real effective terms between end-December 2012 and end-June 2013)...First quarter GDP growth jumped to 4.1 percent (SAAR) after two quarters of stagnation...These generally positive developments were confirmed in May through a further rise in industrial production (2 percent m/m) and retail sales (1.5 percent m/m)...Prices have been rising for three months on a sequential basis...is consistent with the increase in long-term inflation expectations...Inflation is projected to gradually increase to 0.7 percent by end-2013 as growth improves, inflation expectations rise...(4) Business conditions have continued to improve as indicated by the second-quarter Tankan Survey results released on July 1. Growth in 2013 is projected at 2 percent, mainly as a result of the new fiscal stimulus and monetary easing feeding through to private consumption and with some lag to investment...In 2014, growth is expected to moderate to 1.2 percent.<sup>62</sup>

In this sense, stable stock market and export industries accelerated sharp growth. Positive outlooks for the near-term economic prospects improved inflation expectation. In particular, inflation expectations were crucial for Abenomics to adopt a new framework for Japan's economy and to achieve the government's goal of 2 percent real GDP growth and 2 percent inflation target. The combination of monetary and fiscal

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<sup>62</sup> "Japan," IMF Country Report No. 13/253, August 2013, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr13253.pdf>.

policy, which were driven by the BOJ's quantitative and qualitative easing and by the bold governmental fiscal stimulus, helped the market to understand that Abenomics could change prevailing deflation trends with its long-term policy.

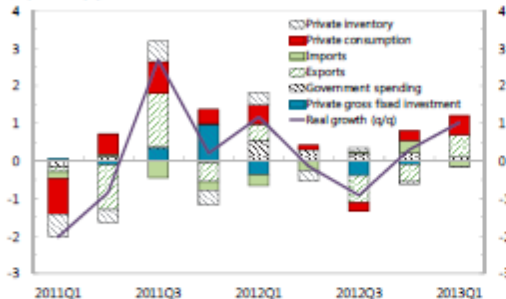
An expectation of new economic trends towards revitalization resulting from the initial outcomes of Abenomics was reflected in the Upper House election. The ruling coalition, the LDP and the New Komeito, won 76 seats out of 121 contested in the Upper House elections on 21 July 2013; they gained a majority by securing 135 of the 242 seats of the Upper House chamber. According to a survey conducted by *Yomiuri Shimbun* right before the election, 86 percent of the people regarded the economy and employment issues as the most important concerns for the election.<sup>63</sup> These concerns of the public were decisively coincident with the economic agenda of the cabinet, which was the top priority policy. As a result, the second Abe administration finally achieved a majority in both houses and created a foundation of political stability. By securing full control of both houses, the cabinet became more comfortable managing domestic affairs in diverse fields. With Abe still enjoying above-50 percent approval ratings at this point, the Japanese people signaled to push forward with Abenomics. Abe also gained strong political momentum with this public confidence. An expectation of economic revival was translated into support of the Abe administration, and Abe made a foundation for firm domestic political stability.

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<sup>63</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Abe Settle In," *Comparative Connections* 15.2 (September 2013).

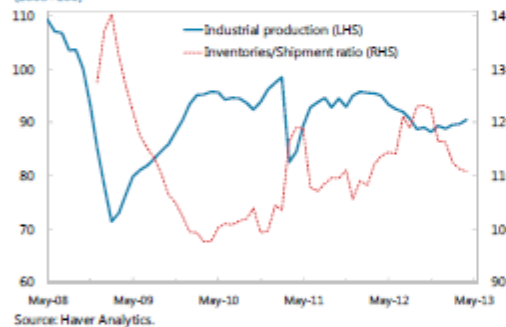
First-quarter GDP growth rose to 4.1 percent (SAAR) after two quarters of stagnation helped by strong consumption and exports...

**Contributions to Growth (SA)**  
(In percent, q/q)



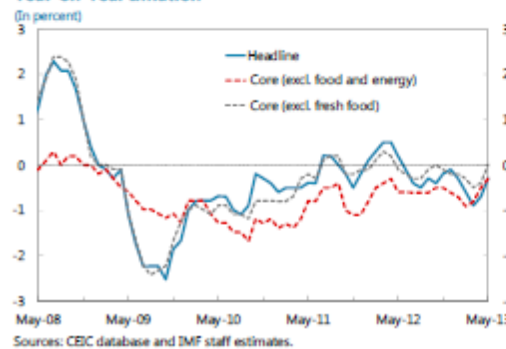
Private investment has remained flat given previous high inventory, although industrial production is picking up.

**Industrial Production and Inventory**  
(2005=100)



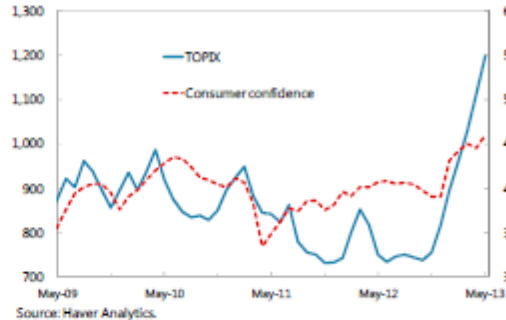
Year-on-year inflation remains sluggish.

**Year-on-Year Inflation**  
(In percent)



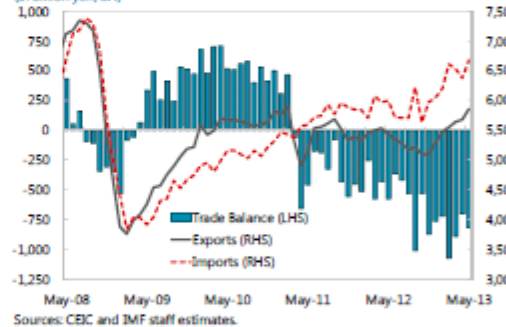
... due to rising consumer confidence, the wealth effect from the surge in equities, and a weaker yen.

**Consumer Confidence and Stock Markets**  
(Indices)



Trade deficits have been sizeable despite rising export against the background of higher energy imports.

**Trade balance**  
(In billion yen, SA)



Although volatile, there are signs that prices are picking up gradually on a sequential basis.

**Consumer Price Index**  
(Index, 2010=100)

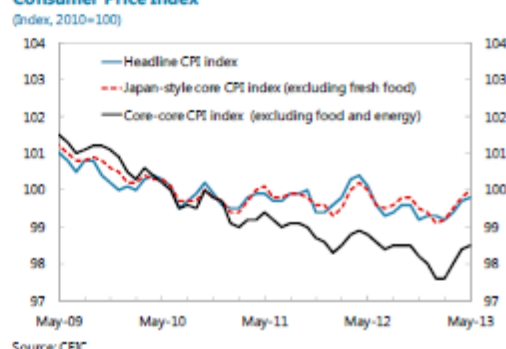
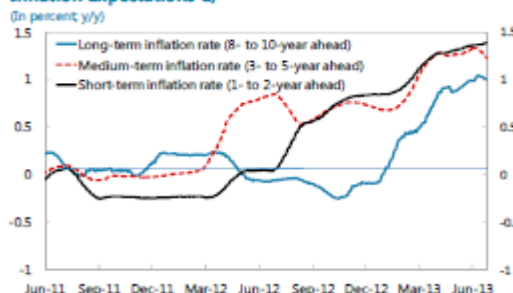


Figure 2. Japanese Economic Development and Outlook, August 2013<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Source: IMF Country Report No. 13/253, August 2013, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr13253.pdf>.

Market indicators on inflation expectations have risen over the past few months ...

#### Inflation Expectations 1/

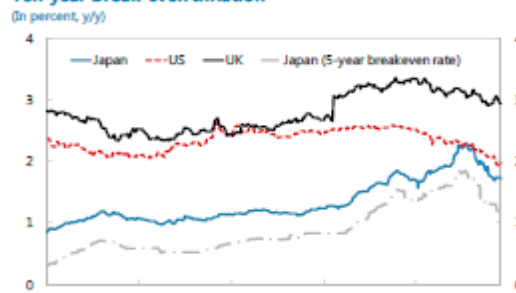


Source: Bloomberg.

1/ Estimated as 1 MMA of implied CPI based on inflation swap bid and ask prices.

... although indicators of long-term inflation expectations from break-even rates have started to decline recently.

#### Ten-year Break-even Inflation



Source: Bloomberg.

The Bank of Japan has introduced its new quantitative and qualitative monetary easing (QQME) framework in April,

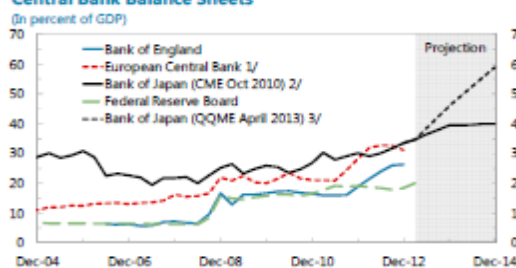
#### BoJ Monetary Base & Balance Sheet Protection

(In trillions of yen)	Dec-12	Dec-13	Dec-14
		Projections	
<b>Monetary base</b>	138	200	270
(in percent of GDP)	29	42	66
<b>BoJ balance sheet</b>			
Total assets	158	220	290
(in percent of GDP)	33	46	69
JGBs	89	140	190
Commercial paper	2.1	2.2	2.2
Corporate bonds	2.9	3.2	3.2
Exchange-traded funds (ETFs)	1.5	2.5	3.5
Real Estate Investment Trusts (J-REITs)	0.11	0.14	0.17
Loan support program	3.3	13	18
Other	59	59	73
Total liabilities	134	195	265
Bank notes	87	88	90
Current deposits	47	107	175

Source: Bank of Japan.

... which would make its balance sheet the largest among key central banks in percent of GDP.

#### Central Bank Balance Sheets



1/ 2012Q1 Euro Area GDP projection based on WEO.

2/ Comprehensive monetary easing was introduced October 2010.

3/ QQME (quantitative and qualitative monetary easing) was introduced April 2013.

Source: Bank of Japan, Haver Analytics, WEO, and Eurostat.

The policy effect on the yield curve has so far been mixed...

#### JGB Yield Curve and Range 1/

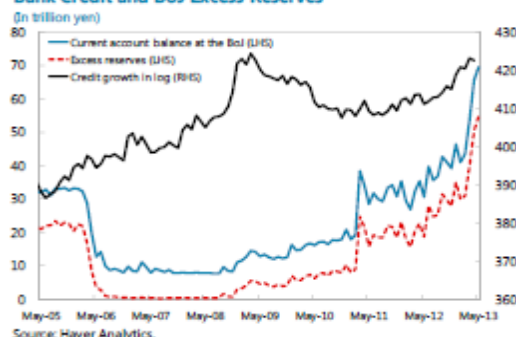


Source: Bloomberg.

1/ Range indicates max & min yields per maturity per indicated maturity

... and the portfolio rebalancing so far has mainly led to higher excess reserves.

#### Bank Credit and BoJ Excess Reserves



Source: Haver Analytics.

Figure 3. Japanese Inflation and Monetary Policy, August 2013<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Source: IMF Country Report No. 13/253, August 2013, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr13253.pdf>.

Although Abenomics played a significant role in ensuring Abe's political stability, the prospect for Abenomics was not wholly positive. In April 2014, the cabinet decided to increase the consumption tax rate from five percent to eight percent. Paul Krugman, a Nobel prize laureate in economics, expressed pessimistic views about Japan's April tax increase in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*.<sup>66</sup> Since he regarded creating inflation expectations by quantitative easing as a key factor to extricate Japan from deflation from 1998, Krugman worried about Tokyo's decision as an example of bad timing.<sup>67</sup> Krugman questioned Japan's economic recovery because the tax increase was not helpful to the Japanese economic revitalization, but a shift to economic recession was more likely.<sup>68</sup> Krugman's concern was realized soon after the consumption tax increase through the Japan's economic quarterly real growth index. As shown in Table 1, after the cabinet's decision was applied in the market, the overall economic index turned down.

Table 1. Economic Index Back and Forth after Abenomics and the Consumption Tax Increase<sup>69</sup>

	2012		2013				2014		
	3QT	4QT	1QT	2QT	3QT	4QT	1QT	2QT	3QT
	Before Abenomics		The first year of Abenomics					After tax increase	
Real GDP Growth	-0.5	-0.2	1.5	0.7	0.4	-0.4	1.4	-1.7	-0.5
Household Consumption	-0.4	0.1	1.3	0.8	0.3	-0.1	2.2	-5.2	0.4
Business Investment	-1.2	-0.6	-0.9	2.5	0.5	1.0	6.2	-4.7	-0.4
Public Investment	-3.3	-0.1	4.6	3.1	5.1	1.6	-2.7	0.9	1.4

<sup>66</sup> John D'Amico, "Krugman Warns Abe on Tax Increase," *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 September 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2014/09/19/krugman-warns-abe-on-tax-increase/>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> "Abenomics, Two Years: Achievements and Outlooks," Global Market Report 15-007, Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), January 2015.

Abe seemed to face a dilemma. On one hand, he need to increase taxes to prepare resources to continue the huge fiscal policy for Abenomics while, at the same time, improving Japan's financial transparency. On the other hand, the consumption tax-rise had a negative influence in the market. This sales tax-rise issue is also unpopular because the most Japanese regard it as additional burden on their living standard. Ultimately, Abe chose the latter by declaring a postponement of the consumption tax increase. For Abe, the decision seemed reasonable because he promised Japan economic revitalization and regards this as a top priority policy of the cabinet. As stated above, however, increased national debt could hurt his government by damaging financial transparency. It still does not seem to produce favorable fruits from economic reform, his third arrow. Therefore, the further improved outcome of Abenomics and financial transparency of the government might significantly buoy the Abe cabinet in the long run.

### **C. ELECTION TACTICS**

It is hard to directly compare the electoral tactics of Abe's two tenures because, while Abe resigned soon after the 2007 Upper House election in his first administration, he held three elections in his second administration. Additionally, electoral campaign issues that Abe raised were considerably different between the tenures. In particular, in the second term, Abe demonstrated that an economic agenda was his central campaign issue even after he had established political stability by achieving a majority in elections of both houses. In April 2014, the cabinet had implemented the consumption tax increase, whose success proved dubious. Abe then strategically strengthened his political position, however, and regained credibility through calling for a snap election of the 2014 December Lower House. This section will briefly review the major features of elections between the first and second tenures and explore how Abe's election tactics, especially in his second tenure, influenced domestic politics and policy dynamics.

#### **1. Abe's First Tenure**

The main difference between the two Abe administrations were the main campaign issues Abe tried to promote to the public. In Abe's first term, a constitutional revision agenda was the central issue of the election. In the 2007 Upper House election in

July, Abe's main campaign slogan was the Beautiful Country, which was that Abe raised ideological and political issues such as transforming the JSDF into a normal military. In the election, however, the issues that Abe raised could not lead voters' concerns; people had paid most attention to the pension issue and scandals of the cabinet itself, as mentioned in an earlier section. Meanwhile, the DPJ condemned Abe's being out of touch with the concerns of people's daily lives, and carried the voters' mind with the slogan of Putting People's Lives First. Some analysts emphasized that the Japanese public was not accustomed to the nationalist agenda that Abe raised.<sup>70</sup> Considering this, the Japanese people had seemed more concerned with butter issues than gun issues. Consequently, the 2007 Upper House election damaged the first Abe administration severely, allowing the DPJ to take a majority in the House of Councilors for the first time in history. Soon after, Abe announced his resignation.

## **2. Abe's Second Tenure**

Unlike the first tenure, Abe brought economic issues into focus both in the election campaign and during the second term. In the general election in December 2012, Abe appealed to the Japanese people to promise economic revival by shouting a slogan of *Take Back Japan*. It was the exact same strategy that the DPJ followed in the 2007 Upper House election. During the DPJ rule of 2009–2012, Japan continued to experience economic stagnation, and people were psychologically more shaken by the factor of the Great East Japan Earthquake. In addition, Noda, the last prime minister of the DPJ, sought public support for his decision to increase the consumption tax regardless of the situation. Abe's economics-focused strategy in the election led to a huge victory as the LDP held 294 of the chamber's 480 seats. After the election, Abe held enough power to override a denial of the Upper House by the coalition party, with the New Komeito securing a super majority (above a two-thirds majority) in the Lower House. Abe continued to focus his concern on economic revitalization by promoting Abenomics. Abenomics was significant to Abe's aim of securing a majority in the Upper House in the July 2013 election because the DPJ still had maintained a majority in the Upper House. If

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<sup>70</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Fukuda Takes the Helm," *Comparative Connections* 9.3 (October 2007).



Abe failed to secure a majority in the Upper House, the DPJ could make political gridlock and cause political instability for the regime. As stated in the earlier chapter on economic aspects, the initial success of Abenomics was critical for winning the Upper House election, and Abe finally obtained political stability in both houses. Although the coalition government failed to win a super majority this time, they maintained a majority in the Upper House by securing 135 of the 242 seats in the chamber. Abe politically became more comfortable because he could carry out his policy with the confidence of expecting an easy approach to the legislative proceedings.

These economy-centered campaign tactics continued to prevail in successive elections. Every slogan of the elections in Abe's second term had been adjusted to the economic revival, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Election Campaign Slogans between the Two Abe Administrations<sup>71</sup>

<b>Elections</b>	<b>Campaign slogans</b>	<b>Note</b>
2007 Upper House	Beautiful country	First tenure
2012 Lower House	Take back Japan	Second tenure
2013 Upper House	Recover, Japan	
2014 Lower House	For economic recovery, this is the only path	Snap election
2016 Upper House	Forward with strength this path	

Since the ruling coalition party secured a majority in both houses in the 2013 Upper House election, with the 2014 Lower House election slogan of *For Economic Recovery, This Is The Only Path* or the 2016 Upper House election slogan of *Forward With Strength This Path*, Abe continuously appealed to the economic issues mainly during the election periods. This trend seemed natural since the economic agenda was a top priority

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<sup>71</sup> Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, “kouyaku kanren” [About Pledges], accessed 17 November 2016, <https://www.jimin.jp/policy/manifest/>.

in the second Abe administration, but it also started to show Abe's separate strategy between election tactics and pursuing his security goals as policy itself. In July 2014, Abe announced a cabinet decision of developing new security legislation and revealed his hope to discuss the right of collective self-defense.<sup>72</sup> This announcement was a conspicuous agenda change raised by the prime minister from economy to security in the second Abe administration. In relative terms, however, Abe did not raise a strong voice for the security agenda, and he changed his attitude to focus more on the economic agenda during election periods. In the first administration, Abe directly raised constitutional amendment discourse as a central campaign issue and tried to be evaluated by the Japanese people through the election. Meanwhile, Abe preferred explaining governmental perspective toward security discourse more proactively to raising those issues directly in the election during the second tenure. Katsuya Okada, the DPJ leader, argued that the economy was not a real concern for Abe, but just misdirection: "during the campaign, Prime Minister Abe has not mentioned amendment of the Constitution. This is a stealth approach."<sup>73</sup> In the elections of his second tenure, unlike his first tenure, Abe was not emphasizing constitutional amendment and defense policy issues. Rather, Abe shifted his image to the public as a leader who pursued economic revitalization and promoted economic reform continuously in the elections.

Abe's unique election tactics were dramatically highlighted through the snap election in 2014. The Japanese Diet consists of two Houses of Representatives, the Upper House and the Lower House. The Houses of Representatives are elected through the periodic elections. The Lower House election, usually known as the general election, occurs every four years while the Upper House election occurs every three years and changes half of the Upper House representatives in every election. A prime minister is selected from the majority party of the Lower House. That means citizens choose a prime minister indirectly. Simply put, there are two steps in electing the executive. Citizens elect legislators at first, then legislators choose their prime minister. Traditionally, within

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<sup>72</sup> Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe," (speech, the press conference, 1 July 2014), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201407/0701kaiken.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201407/0701kaiken.html).

<sup>73</sup> Linda Sieg, "Japan Ruling Bloc Election Win Could Be Too Big for Markets to Swallow," *Reuters*, 6 July 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-election-idUSKCN0ZM0D8>.

the LDP, its president has served as a prime minister. The cabinet is established by the prime minister nominating the cabinet members. The relations between the cabinet and parliament is more dynamic due to the snap election mechanism of the parliamentary system. The cabinet and parliament have to satisfy each other; each one, however, can also fire the other at any time. A prime minister can decide to call for elections according to his political strategy while a parliament can also pass a vote of no-confidence in the cabinet. When a prime minister decides to call for a snap election, he or she accepts a political risk resulting from the outcome of that election. On the one hand, a prime minister could lose his or her position if credibility is lost through the election results. In the more serious case, if it loses the majority to the opposition party, the existing ruling party should accept a regime change. For example, Prime Minister Noda decided on a snap election in 2012 and the DPJ lost outright. Ironically, that snap election provided Abe with his return to power. On the other hand, Noda could have renewed confidence in his party presidency and prime ministership if he had won the election. Thus, the snap election is like a political gamble to a prime minister.

Abe wanted to continue his economic policy and change the negative political mood from the consumption tax rise by the snap election in December 2014 instead of the pre-scheduled Lower House election in 2016. In the press conference on 11 November 2014, Abe announced that he made a decision to postpone an original plan of the consumption tax-rate increase from 8 percent to 10 percent in October 2015 until 18 months later, in April 2017.<sup>74</sup> This decision was deeply connected to the negative economic growth since the cabinet had recently raised the consumption tax rate from five percent to eight percent in April 2014.<sup>75</sup> Abe confessed that a recent economic index failed to return to a growth track following the consumption tax rise by releasing the third quarter estimate of GDP.<sup>76</sup> Abe concluded that the main reason for this recession was raising the sales tax rate. Ultimately, Abe regarded the consumption tax increase as a key

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<sup>74</sup> Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe," (speech, the press conference, 11 November 2014), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201411/1118kaiken.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201411/1118kaiken.html).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

element to prevent Abenomics from achieving an economic revival. As review of the initial outcome of Abenomics in previous section showed, Abenomics continued to pose positive economic results from the beginning of the second Abe administration. Therefore, Abe had to consider that raising the consumption tax rate further would bring a fatal outcome to Abenomics. For these reasons, Abe wanted to delay the sales tax and ask the people for their opinion on changing his original pledge of the consumption tax rate.

The snap election reflected the underlying political calculations of the Abe administration. Even though Abe called for the dissolution of parliament due to the reason of the consumption tax issue, in fact, he asked people for their re-approval of Abenomics. Although people started to question Abenomics from the time of the first tax increase, Abenomics had politically significant meaning for Abe because Abenomics was an engine to lead Abe's political revival at home and create a decisive source of development of Japan's economic power in the world as well. If Abe won the snap election, he could acquire enough political legitimacy to push through Abenomics by eliminating criticism of the program. By doing so, Abe could reinitiate political stability and push his economic policy again.<sup>77</sup>

Also, Abe calculated that he was not at risk to lose the snap election. Since eight percent of the consumption tax applied in the last April, the majority of the public reacted negatively to the second sales tax increase in October 2015, and these public voices have gradually increased as time goes by. In a survey in November 2014 conducted before the snap election, public opinion was reflected as follows: 47 percent of the people supported Abe's decision to postpone the consumption tax increase while 40 percent of the people opposed it. Regarding the consumption tax increase itself, 40 percent of the people responded that the ten percent tax increase should be delayed until April 2017 and 39 percent of the people responded that it should be abrogated, while only 14 percent of the

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<sup>77</sup> Toko Sekiguchi and George Nishiyama, "Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Calls Snap Election," *The Wall Street Journal* (18 November 2014), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/japan-prime-minister-shinzo-abe-announces-election-1416307086>.

people responded that the tax increase should move ahead on schedule.<sup>78</sup> As shown in the poll, almost 80 percent of people opposed the planned sales tax increase, and almost half of the public agreed with Abe's policy. Considering the public's concern toward the additional sales tax increase, it could be inferred that the possibility of losing the snap election of the ruling coalition party was relatively low. Therefore, through the snap election, Abe would renew the motivation of Abenomics by the mandate of the Japanese public with relatively low possibility of political risk.

In addition, on the premise of gaining confidence through winning the snap election, Abe could enjoy short- and long-term benefits. As a short-term benefit, Abe could take the advantageous position first among competitors in the coming president election of the LDP in 2015. Since Abe had been president of the LDP from 2012, he reached the end of the three-year term in late 2015. In order to continue his term in office as prime minister, Abe needed to be reelected as president of the LDP. If he maintained a majority in the Lower House election, Abe could continue to serve as LDP president because of his mandate from the people. It is hard to imagine politicians within the LDP running against a prime minister who is supported by the majority. By winning the snap election, Abe could deepen and expand his influence within the LDP.

Conversely, if Abe had not called for the snap election in 2014 and the economic situation worsened, it could have been a less favorable situation for him in facing the 2015 president election in the LDP because he would have lost ground as a prime minister. Furthermore, this would be a worst-case scenario for both Abe and the LDP—whatever the result of Abe's reelection as party president—because this could potentially indicate a decline of the ruling power. To both Abe and a new prime minister, depending on the result of the president election within the LDP, political decline potential would have a huge burden on the 2016 general election ahead. Thus, under the conviction that the Abe administration would have a victory in the election, it was clear that the decision to proceed with the snap election was politically calculated to help both Abe and the LDP.

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<sup>78</sup> “2014nen 11gatsu chosa” [2014 November Poll], *TV Asahi*, November 2014, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/201411/index.html>.

As a long-term political benefit, Abe would be able to create a foundation of political stability to discuss normalization discourse until his end of official tenure. If Abe had succeeded in both snap elections, he would have had the benefit of political comfort because there would have been no Lower House election, delaying the opportunity for the opposition party to take power, until 2018. As stated above, since there was a high possibility that a success of the snap election would ensure Abe's duty as president of the LDP, Abe could continue to secure his term in office in 2018. This would have significant implications to normalization trajectory in two dimensions.

First, Abe would create an opportunity to push the Collective Self Defense Right agenda. Since Abe achieved political stability by securing a majority in both houses, he gradually moved his agenda from economic issues to security issues. In particular, Abe tried to raise the necessity of the Collective Self Defense Right to shape a better security environment through direct and indirect channels. A negative economic status following the consumption tax increase, however, made domestic concern return to the economic issues, and Abe finally could not help deciding the snap election. Still, the Japanese public was not friendly to the government's normalization approach; therefore, it is important to create a favorable domestic environment to deepen Abe's security agenda again. This environment also would help to develop discourse on the Constitution amendment of Article 9. Probably, Abe looked forward to reinitiate his security agenda through a victory in the snap election in his political calculation.

Second, Abe would gain enough time to focus on devoting all his energy to the Upper House election in 2016. On the premise of the LDP reassuring a majority in the snap election, Abe could earn almost two years of freedom with political legitimacy. During this time, Abe would accelerate a concrete election strategy toward the Upper House election. Although Abe secured a majority in the last 2013 Upper House election, he failed to gain a two thirds majority. To achieving the super majority is significant for Abe because the two thirds majority is a necessary condition to revising the Constitution. Practically, securing the super majority of the 2016 Upper House election could be the last chance for Abe to amend Article 9 in his official term. Thus, securing the super majority of the House of Councilors is vital to the process of legislating a revised

constitution bill smoothly. Considering Abe's political calculation to the roadmap toward normalization, it could be possible to observe that Abe made his bid for victory to normalization trajectory through the snap election.

As the result of the snap election carried out on 14 December 2014, Abe enjoyed political benefits. The coalition of the LDP and New Komeito achieved a huge win to mark a two thirds majority. The ruling coalition party secured 326 of 475 seats in the Lower House election. By winning the gamble, Abe gathered diverse political advantages. Above all, he regained political stability with the confidence and overcame criticism through the snap election. Abe could consolidate his position within the LDP as well as his presidency. In the 2015 president election of the LDP, no one stood as a candidate for the election. Naturally, Abe's role of the president of the LDP continued to extend until 2018, and thus his role as prime minister as well. This political strength was beyond a check and balance from the opposition party. As a result, Abe achieved a super majority in the 2016 Upper House election in July, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Election Results in the Second Abe administration<sup>79</sup>

<b>Elections</b>	<b>Results (the coalition ruling party*)</b>	<b>Note</b>
2012 Lower House	securing 325 of 480 seats in the chamber	Super majority**
2013 Upper House	securing 135 of 242 seats in the chamber	The majority
2014 Lower House	securing 326 of 475 seats in the chamber	Super majority
2016 Upper House	securing 146 of 242 seats in the chamber	Super majority

\*Seats of the coalition ruling party is the sum total of seats secured by the LDP and New Komeito.

\*\*Super majority means securing more than two thirds of the total seats of a house.

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<sup>79</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, "Senkyo kanren siryou" [Data about the Elections], accessed 17 November 2016, [http://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo\\_s/data/shugiin/index.html](http://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo_s/data/shugiin/index.html).

With this, Abe could satisfy the minimum condition to raise constitutional revision in accordance with procedures and methods determined by law by securing super majorities in both houses. Relevant particulars related to this will be dealt with in the following chapter. Also, Abe ensured the legitimacy to push Abenomics again by securing a mandate from the public. With this, Abe could strongly continue to drive economic policy through his three arrows. This meant Abe continued to look forward to exploiting his economic narrative in various parts of politics.

The victory of the 2014 snap election, however, did not necessarily indicate only positive aspects of the second Abe administration. According to the poll conducted by *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the main reason to choose the ruling party, at 65 percent, was that the LDP was relatively more attractive than the other opposition parties; only 7 percent of the people, however, responded that they choose the LDP due to support for Abenomics.<sup>80</sup> This survey revealed two implications that might be potential weak points for the Abe administration. First, it can be inferred that the real reason the Japanese people gave a mandate to the ruling party was that the opposition party was weak and not credible, rather than the public's judgment being driven by the good governance of the Abe administration itself. It can be also inferred that the Japanese people probably did not have high hopes for Abenomics. The reason why they chose to keep the current cabinet might be that they saw no economic alternatives to Abenomics because the government already had invested enormous capital in its long-term planning. That means that success or failure of Abenomics could be a significant indicator for the Abe administration in the future. More important, however, was that Abe obtained a superficially strong domestic mandate to execute his presidency despite these concerns, and it seemed that there were no severe competitors to threaten Abe's administration.

Abe achieved a huge success in multiple elections during his second tenure. He knew that, in the election, the main issue of the public was economic well-being because he had learned a lesson from the experience of his first administration. Therefore, unlike his first administration, Abe separated political strategy from policy regarding

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<sup>80</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Heading to the End Zone on TPP and Defense," *Comparative Connections* 16.3 (January 2015).



ideological, defense and security issues such as constitutional amendment and the right of collective self-defense as an election agenda. Abe thoroughly focused on his economic agenda as an election tactic and pursued his security issues as policy only. Consequently, Abe's crucial decision to dismiss parliament and call for the snap election was an accurate political calculation. This political decision was significant in creating an opportunity to consolidate his reputation in the domestic power dynamics, both within the LDP and in the wider party politics.

#### **D. SECURITY POLICY**

During his first term in office, historic issues and the nuclear crisis provoked by North Korea were dominant concerns for the Abe administration. Both issues gave Abe challenges and opportunities. In his second term in office, restoration of the U.S.-Japan alliance, which was at a low point during the DPJ administration, was a top priority for national security. Unlike the first tenure, greater security concern about rising China and North Korea prevented enhancing the relationships with those nations; Abe's softened historic perspective about the comfort women issue, however, was able to shed a new light on the trilateral relations with the United States and South Korea. Meanwhile, through both tenures, Abe attached importance to the U.S.-Japan alliance in order to pursue proactive diplomacy. The key feature that shows the difference between the two tenures is that Abe was substantially able to specify his security roadmap one by one by accomplishing several security bills during his second tenure.

##### **1. Abe's First Tenure**

On 15 August 2006, Prime Minister Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine, which memorialized the names of Class-A war criminals of the Second World War period. Koizumi visited Yasukuni after he became prime minister, but obviously Koizumi's first visit on August 15 shocked China and South Korea. For those countries, August 15 is the anniversary of independence. John Ikenberry condemned Koizumi's Yasukuni visit by

criticizing Japan's "history problem" that still caused China and South Korea suspicion and unhappiness.<sup>81</sup>

On the security side, North Korea was considered a higher priority than other issues in the first Abe administration. Two months before Abe was elected prime minister, seven missiles were launched by North Korea near the coast of Japan, including a long-range missile known as Taepodong-2 on 5 July 2006.<sup>82</sup> More surprisingly, despite United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemnation of its behavior, North Korea conducted a nuclear test for the first time in its history on 9 October 2006. This nuclear crisis was one of the highest security concerns for Tokyo after the end of the Cold War.

North Korea's nuclear issue provided Japan with both challenges and opportunities. Japan regarded the nuclear test as a significant threat. Abe proceeded to strengthen security cooperation with neighboring countries. In particular, Abe and President George Bush reaffirmed the U.S.-Japan alliance by dealing with the nuclear crisis, and cooperated with each other on several issues such as missile defense, U.S. forces in Okinawa, and Tokyo's reconciliation with neighbors, especially China and South Korea, related to historical issues.

The nuclear crisis also put pressure on Japan to create an incentive to build relations with China and South Korea. On 8 October 2006, Abe visited China. Tokyo and Beijing agreed to restrain the North Korean nuclear program at the summit between Abe and Hu Jintao, the Chinese President. In addition, the two countries agreed to cooperation in conflicts over natural resources around the East China Sea through a Japan-China security dialogue. Both sides relieved tension resulting from Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni on 15 August.<sup>83</sup>

On 9 October 2006, Abe travelled to Seoul to meet Roh Moo-hyun, the South Korean President. Because the summit was held after an announcement of the nuclear test

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<sup>81</sup> G. John Ikenberry, "Japan's History Problem," *The Washington Post*, August 17, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/16/AR2006081601427.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Dana Priest and Anthony Faiola, "North Korea Tests Long-Range Missile," *The Washington Post*, 5 July 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/04/AR2006070400649.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Abe Shows the Right Stuff," *Comparative Connections* 8.4 (January 2007).

by North Korea, both sides had no choice but to focus on the conversation dealing with this challenge rather than historical issues like the Yasukuni visit and the Dokdo (Takeshima) issue.<sup>84</sup> Through a joint statement, Seoul and Tokyo agreed on two major themes. One was that both countries could not tolerate North Korea's behavior, condemning it as "a grave threat." Another was that Seoul and Tokyo agreed to start "joint research on history" and make an effort to promote the bilateral relationship with a mind "toward the future."<sup>85</sup>

During his first tenure, Abe also showed his will to coordinate with China and South Korea by not visiting Yasukuni officially. Ironically, the crisis from the North Korean nuclear test opened the door for Tokyo to increase ties with China and South Korea. Abe also pursued expanding political and economic ties with Southeast Asian countries and upgrading the strategic relationship with India. Internally, he tried to let *kantei* have a major effect on both defense and crisis management by establishing the National Security Council (NSC) and upgrading the Japan Defense Agency to Ministry of Defense status in 2007.

## **2. Abe's Second Tenure**

In Abe's second administration, restoring the U.S.-Japan alliance was the main security issue. From a conservationist perspective, during the DPJ rule from 2009 to 2012, the U.S.-Japan alliance showed worse coordination than ever before. For example, over three years of DPJ rule, Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko was the only prime minister to visit Washington officially.<sup>86</sup> Abe wanted the U.S.-Japan alliance back in place.

Abe has strengthened the U.S.-Japan alliance more strongly than ever and put the U.S.-Japan alliance as the top priority in his security policy; the alliance is the main axis the LDP pursues as a foreign policy with Abe's slogan, "proactive pacifism." Abe declared his foreign policy priorities as follows: (1) revitalizing the U.S.-Japan alliance,

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<sup>84</sup> Green, "US-Japan Relations: Abe Shows the Right Stuff."

<sup>85</sup> Green, "US-Japan Relations: Abe Shows the Right Stuff."

<sup>86</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Back to Normal?" *Comparative Connections* 14.1 (May 2012).

(2) increasing the defense budget and establishing the right of collective self-defense, and (3) communication on energy policy, including nuclear safety.<sup>87</sup> Abe regarded the U.S.-Japan alliance as a “cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy.”<sup>88</sup> In both the first and second Abe administrations, Abe attached importance to the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Unlike Abe’s first administration efforts to build relations with Asian neighbors, current relations with China and South Korea are often blocked due to Abe’s bold speech and behavior based on history revisionism. Including historical issues such as Abe’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine in 2013, a controversial history textbook, comfort women issues and, especially, territorial disputes over the Senkaku and Dokdo (Takeshima) Islands, Japan looks likely to pursue physical confrontation rather than diplomatic negotiations.

In particular, rising China and its military build-up became a factor for the current administration to attend to security with more concern than before. The tension between China and Japan seemed more severe after China surpassed Japan in economic growth in 2010. Beijing and Tokyo deepened tension around the Senkaku Islands in 2010 and 2012 due to the Noda administration’s purchasing of the Senkaku Islands. On 23 November 2013, China declared the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Soon after China’s declaration of ADIZ, Japanese public opinion towards China got worse. According to the survey, 87 percent of Japanese felt relations between the two countries were not ideal; China was regarded as a military threat by 78 percent of the public.<sup>89</sup> Maritime security around the Southeast China Sea still holds the potential for regional conflicts.

In this sense, Japan had to look forward to reducing its security concerns by intensifying the U.S.-Japan alliance. The 2008 Obama Asian rebalancing strategy known as the “Pivot to Asia” also made more room to increase Japanese defense capabilities. Usually, the United States does not take a position on sovereignty issues for other countries. It did, however, make a decision to defend Japan’s territory, including the

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<sup>87</sup> Green, “US-Japan Relations: Back to Normal?”

<sup>88</sup> Abe, “Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” 26 December 2012.

<sup>89</sup> Michael J. Green, “US-Japan Relations: Big Steps, Big Surprise,” *Comparative Connections* 15.3 (January 2014).

Senkakus, under the terms of an Article of the 1960 U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.<sup>90</sup> *The Diplomat* also reported, “Barack Obama, for the first time, took a side on the Senkaku dispute, backing Japan.”<sup>91</sup> Under the U.S.-Japan alliance, Abe completed an additional amendment for the new defense guidelines in the direction of intensifying support of the United States. In addition, finally, Abe completed legislation about Collective Self-Defense with the United States at his back. The Abe administration’s bold moves along a normalization trajectory would proceed within the framework of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

In Japan’s relations with the Korean Peninsula, North Korea’s provocations became more severe than in Abe’s first tenure. Kim Jong-un became a new leader, and he seemed successfully to consolidate his power within the regime. Under Kim’s regime, North Korea conducted bolder military provocations. Several nuclear tests and development of diverse ballistic missile capability directly threatened Japan and other regional states. Abe countered North Korea’s actions by imposing unilateral economic sanctions and actively participating in the resolutions provided by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In addition, Abe tried to strengthen internal balancing to these military threats by amending security bills. Meanwhile, it was surprising that Japan and Korea reached an agreement on “comfort women” on 28 December 2015. Abe’s sincerity toward the agreement, however, remained in doubt when he later took the opposite stance to the agreement by saying, “There was no evidence showing that the women were forcibly mobilized.”<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, the comfort women agreement with South Korea in December 2015 had positive effects on the international society as well as appealing to the Japanese. Japan is looking forward to strengthening regional cooperation against any provocation by North Korea through the trilateral U.S.-Japan-ROK relations.

Considering this security environment stated above, unlike in his first tenure, most importantly Abe accomplished several institutional changes in the security domain. These achievements involved fundamentally changed security contents. Abe established

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<sup>90</sup> Green, “US-Japan Relations: Meet the New Boss/Same as the Old Boss?”

<sup>91</sup> Ankit Panda, “Obama: Senkakus Covered Under US-Japan Security Treaty,” *The Diplomat*, 24 April 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/obama-senkakus-covered-under-us-japan-security-treaty/>.

<sup>92</sup> Whan-woo Yi, “Abe’s Distortion over Comfort Women Recurs,” *The Korea Times*, 19 January 2016, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/01/120\\_195814.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/01/120_195814.html).

the National Security Council (NSC) (which is directly subordinate to his office), published a National Security Strategy (NSS), launched the State Secrecy Law, and approved the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) base in Okinawa in 2013. Then, the Abe cabinet approved its defense equipment and technology transfers abroad by launching Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology in 2014. Finally, under the National Defense Programme Guidelines (NDPG) of the U.S.-Japan alliance, Abe was successful in paving the way for use of forces overseas by passing the collective self-defense right in 2015. More specific details about how Abe has accomplished these achievements will be examined in the following chapters.

### **III. ABE'S PRAGMATISM**

In an earlier chapter, we discussed what happened in both of Abe's tenures and discovered major differences between the two Abe administrations when comparing agenda setting, economic policy, election tactics, and security policy. During both tenures, Abe continued to try to pave the way for his specific visions and belief about the normalization trajectory for a "beautiful country." Between the two tenures, however, Abe showed considerably different approaches to obtaining his goals. The political outcomes that followed were also different. In particular, Abe's pragmatic approach was a central element leading to better success in his second administration than his first. Abe's pragmatism established political stability by managing his political capital and creating an environment conducive to security discourse. This chapter explores how Abe's pragmatism brought about Abe's political success.

#### **A. ABE'S PRAGMATISM AND HIS POLITICAL CAPITAL**

Many changes of the second Abe administration have been attributed to Abe's pragmatic approach to statecraft. In the first tenure, Abe had promoted his aggressive national security agenda straightforwardly to the Japanese public, who was unfamiliar with it. As a result, he quickly lost political capital, without an opportunity to recover. In his second tenure, however, Abe managed political assets by watching the trend of public opinion and using this trend in elections. Abe's election win and approval ratings helped him to both change the political agenda and recover a support base. Abe was also pragmatic in addressing national security issues, using a step-by-step approach to deepen the security discourse. Abe's pragmatism was reflected in the changing Japanese political trends and his own political experiences. Abe's political success in his second administration has been mostly influenced by both of these structural and individual factors.

When the LDP only controlled the Lower House, Abe generally adjusted his approach based on the voters' primary interest fields and focused on accumulating support bases. Abe demonstrated his pragmatism by improving his administration's

approval ratings, which resulted in the LDP retaking the Upper House. In a democratic system, it is natural that results of election and approval ratings are significant for the political regime because a mandate from the majority ensures the winner's political stability. Politically, an absolute control of both houses was vital and a primary objective for the new Abe administration. As discussed in the previous chapter, Abe's election tactics stayed parallel to his economic agenda, the area of most interest to the Japanese people. This pragmatic approach resulted in Abe's election formula, including a new economic promise and political flexibility in changing his pledge to his advantage right before the elections. Table 4 shows Abe's election pledges in the elections.

Table 4. Abe's Election Pledges<sup>93</sup>

<b>Elections</b>	<b>Abe's election pledge</b>	<b>Political timing</b>
2013 Upper House (21 July)	New growth strategy (14 June)	Positive outcome of Abenomics
2014 Lower House (14 December)	Postpone the sales tax (first time, 11 November)	
2016 Upper House (10 July)	Postpone the sales tax (second time, 1 June)	Obama's visit to Hiroshima, G7 summit (27 May)

On 14 June 2013, Abe proposed a new growth strategy a month before the Upper House election in July, when the LDP was a minority in the Upper House.<sup>94</sup> It was good timing because the economic mood was favorable to Abenomics, which had shown a positive signal of economic index in the first and second quarters in 2013. Abe met the people's economic expectations by announcing a new economic growth strategy. He promised the public that he was planning to increase the per capita income of Japan by \$15,000 during the next decade.<sup>95</sup> Although it was obviously hard to verify whether this

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<sup>93</sup> Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, "kouyaku kanren" [About Pledges].

<sup>94</sup> "New Growth Strategy: The Formulation of Japan Revitalization Strategy-Japan is Back," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 14 June 2013, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/documents/2013/1200485\\_7321.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2013/1200485_7321.html).

<sup>95</sup> Green, "US-Japan Relations: Abe Settles In."



new pledge could be realized in a month, its effectiveness was confirmed by Abe winning the election.

More surprising was that Abe's election formula continued after his ruling coalition had an ability to control both houses. For instance, as depicted in the election section, Abe called for a snap election in 2014 on the issue of the consumption tax increase. The public opinion was favorable to his decision, and Abe achieved a mandate from the public. When Abe called for the snap election due to the tax issue, he firmly promised no further delay of the consumption tax-rate raise in the future.<sup>96</sup> Abe changed this political pledge once again, however, a month before the Upper House election. Abe announced at the press conference on 1 June 2016 that he decided to postpone the consumption tax increase from its origin schedule in April 2017 to October 2019.<sup>97</sup> Although he won the last election, this time Abe needed to overcome two additional obstacles: (1) the public questioned Abe's credibility as a leader of the government by breaking his pledge, and (2) Abe faced the potential failure of Abenomics through a repetition of postponing the consumption tax increase.<sup>98</sup> Abe actively answered those questions at the press conference by borrowing global leaders' opinion as follows: "Emerging and developing economies are currently in a downturn and the global economy is facing large risks. I shared this recognition the other day with the world leaders who came together for the G7 Ise-Shima Summit."<sup>99</sup> In particular, Abe emphasized the global summit's assessment about the global economic situation; thus, his decision was not arbitrary. According to his announcement, therefore, he analyzed the economic trends and talked to the public frankly about managing the economic crisis.<sup>100</sup> Also, Abe explained that the tax delays have never meant the failure of Abenomics, but

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<sup>96</sup> Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe," 11 November 2014.

<sup>97</sup> Shinzo Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe," (speech, the press conference, 1 June 2016), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/statement/201606/1218234\\_11009.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201606/1218234_11009.html).

<sup>98</sup> "Abe's Consumption Tax Decision," *The Japan Times*, 2 June 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/06/02/editorials/abes-consumption-tax-decision/#.WAm4zY8rLcs>.

<sup>99</sup> Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe," 1 June 2016.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

only preparing the risk resulting from global economic downturn.<sup>101</sup> Again, Abe wanted to ask the public again to support his new decision through the election.

Abe's success in ensuring a mandate from the election resulted from his pragmatic approach of arranging political events to his advantage. Abe's decision of delaying the sales tax rise was announced soon after President Obama's historical visit to Hiroshima, site of the first of two atomic bombs dropped on Japan in the Second World War. This political event represented a significant symbol of moving relations forward between the United States and Japan because Obama was the first president to visit the historical place since the Second World War. On 27 May 2016, when Obama visited Hiroshima, he was received with great enthusiasm by the Japanese people. An image of Obama embracing one of the atomic bomb victims was spread all around Japan through the media and touched the Japanese people.<sup>102</sup> Meanwhile, Obama was not the only winner. Abe also enjoyed this benefit because he created a decisive diplomatic effort for President Obama to participate in the event. Obama's visit had a marvelous effect for Abe in his approval rating. Abe marked 55.3 percent approval, an increase of 7 points since the previous month.<sup>103</sup> Politically, Obama's visit to Hiroshima was a perfect timing to counterbalance the sales tax rate increase ahead. Therefore, this series of political events Abe planned proceeded under Abe's detailed political calculation, and this can be inferred to prove his pragmatism.

The most important factor of Abe's pragmatism was that he leaned on public opinion. Abe accepted public opinion again, just as he did in the last election in 2014. As the same pattern, he was confident of voters' response based on the poll. According to the public opinion poll conducted by *Kyodo*, a month before the Upper House election, 70 percent of people supported delaying the sales tax increase policy while 24 percent of

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Sheila A. Smith, "US-Japan Relations: Hiroshima to Hague," *Comparative Connections* 18.2 (September 2016).

<sup>103</sup> "Cabinet's Support Rating Jumps to 55.3% but Obama Speech Wows 98%: Survey," *The Japan Times*, 29 May 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/29/national/politics-diplomacy/cabinets-support-rating-7-points-55-3-survey/#.WAmiHY8rLct>.

people disapproved of it.<sup>104</sup> As a result, Abe's success story continued by ensuring a mandate through the 2016 Upper House election. It was a huge victory to secure the super majority in the Upper House, retaining 146 seats in the 242-seat chamber. Once again, Abe created an opportunity to promote Abenomics. More importantly, Abe could take the advantageous position of leading national security issues by securing the super majority in both houses, a minimum condition for proceeding with a constitutional amendment. Unlike his first administration, Abe compromised with public opinion, especially before the elections. As a result, his flexibility led to his superior position in the election. This case showed how Abe became politically more flexible and how he dealt with public opinion to ensure political stability.

## **B. THE STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY**

Abe's pragmatism led to domestic political stability and created a favorable foundation for his revision goals in the security and defense domain. Knowing this security part was more challenging, Abe continued the pragmatic approach in the national security area. With groundwork completed to create an environment conducive to

developing his national security agenda, Abe also used a pragmatic approach to the security domain by applying a step-by-step approach in expanding his security discourse. In other words, Abe drove his hawkish policies, taking advantage of favorable political timing, and applied relatively modest policies to recover approval of the cabinet.

The new confidence caused by winning several elections allowed him to switch to a national security agenda that he promoted in Japan and throughout Southeast Asia. On 23 July, two days after a victory in the 2013 Upper House election, Abe visited Southeast Asia. Abe's visit can be interpreted as a political message to highlight a new security agenda setting because this region has growing maritime security concerns. In cooperation with the United States, Japan tried to strengthen a relation with ASEAN countries in both the security and economic domains against rising China. After Abe returned to Japan, he revealed that he wanted to discuss the right to collective self-

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<sup>104</sup> "Abe's Consumption Tax Decision," *The Japan Times*.

defense in the press conference.<sup>105</sup> Also, Abe revealed that he would review the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) and institute the National Security Council (NSC) to examine the right of collective self-defense.<sup>106</sup> In the second Abe administration, the timing and place he visited was a turning point to promote his national security agenda in earnest.

This transition of political agenda from economy to security revealed that Abe would take concrete action on his national security policies soon. For example, after Abe returned from Southeast Asia in August, he unilaterally appointed Ichiro Komatsu as the Director-General of the cabinet legislation bureau, which determines how the cabinet should interpret the Japanese Constitution.<sup>107</sup> Komatsu was known as a Constitution revisionist who favored Abe's push for a normal military.<sup>108</sup> In October, Abe suggested the State Secrecy Law, which enables the cabinet to determine defense information as a special secret. Although this law was controversial, it was approved by the national Diet on 6 December 2013. In this way, Abe exploited his prerogatives as a prime minister who possessed a strong advocacy—including the agenda setting, the appointive power, and political capability to control both houses—to ensure passage of the security legislation. This resulting power was possible from the political capital Abe achieved earlier.

Abe skillfully connected political events to the security domain and took rapid political benefits from those events. After having renewed his mandate through the snap election in 2014, Abe decided to increase the 2015 defense budget. The cabinet approved a record high defense budget of \$42 billion, rising 2 percent from the previous year.<sup>109</sup> In succession, when two Japanese hostages were killed by armed members of the Islamic

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<sup>105</sup> Shinzo Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe during His Visit to Southeast Asia," (speech, the press conference, 27 July 2013), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201307/27kaiken\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201307/27kaiken_e.html).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> "Komatsu Posting Sets Stage for Reinterpretation," *The Japan Times*, 8 August 2013, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/08/08/national/politics-diplomacy/komatsu-posting-sets-stage-for-reinterpretation/#.WAYj7JPhDjA>.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Strategic Alignment," *Comparative Connections* 17.1 (May 2015).

State in February, Abe responded rapidly and sensitively by visiting the Middle East and promised humanitarian support to counter brutal terrorism.<sup>110</sup> Using the favorable attitude of public opinion and the press toward his decisions since the hostage incident, Abe tried to revise the law related to JSDF (Japan Self-Defense Forces) deployment and rescue operations. After the Japanese hostage incident, the approval ratings for the cabinet rose, and the debate over Abe's demanding an active role for JSDF was intensified.<sup>111</sup>

In addition to switching agendas, Abe also paid close attention to keeping his political capital when he developed a normalization trajectory process. Since Abe had suggested collective self-defense, this agenda gradually became a central issue in Japan. Exercising the right of collective self-defense was also one of the most significant security policies for Abe to achieve for Japan to be a normal state among the nations of the world. This is because collective self-defense causes a fundamental change in the Japanese security domain. In the current constitution established after WW2, it is denied the right to use armed forces. Collective self-defense, however, could allow using armed forces under certain conditions defined by the state and its ally. This became considerably controversial in Japanese society, dividing the country into pro and anti-camps, because a number of people in Japan still respected a national devotion to protect their pacifist constitution. Therefore, Abe needed a careful approach to pursue his security goals by minimizing political risk to his regime.

Two main directions would enable the establishment of the collective self-defense.<sup>112</sup> The first is directly to amend the Article 9 of the Constitution known as the pacifist constitution, and the second is drawing up the new security legislation based on the constitutional reinterpretation recommended by the Cabinet Legal Bureau. Under this situation, on 1 July 2014, Abe announced that the cabinet made a decision to choose the

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<sup>110</sup> Jacob M. Schlesinger and Hiroyuki Kachi, "Abe's Popularity Rises After Japan Hostage Crisis," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 February 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/abes-popularity-rises-after-japan-hostage-crisis-1423302636>.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> John Nilsson-Wright and Kiichi Fujiwara, "Japan's Abe Administration: Steering a Course between Pragmatism and Extremism," *Asia Programme* (September 2015).

latter.<sup>113</sup> The former included many potential risks in using Article 96, which were too heavy to lose political capital of the Abe administration:

**Article 96.** Amendments to this Constitution shall be initiated by the Diet, through a concurring vote of two-thirds or more of all the members of each House and shall thereupon be submitted to the people for ratification, which shall require the affirmative vote of a majority of all votes cast thereon, at a special referendum or at such election as the Diet shall specify. Amendments when so ratified shall immediately be promulgated by the Emperor in the name of the people, as an integral part of this Constitution.<sup>114</sup>

It seemed unreasonable for Abe to use Article 96 because there were several limitations. Although he could control both houses comfortably, the Upper House did not secure a two-thirds majority. Also, the New Komeito, the coalition party of the LDP, opposed the amendment of Article 9.<sup>115</sup> Importantly, there was no precedent to revise the Japanese Constitution since its enactment in 1947. Even though Abe had accumulated his political capital, and by doing so, established a favorable domestic political environment since 2012, executing Article 96 was a quite risky challenge. In the worst-case scenario, Abe would lose the engine of the regime for the next three years in office if the House of Representatives and the voters rejected the amendment. Therefore, the cabinet chose a more pragmatic way of a relatively possible scenario and preferred a lower risk action even though the amendment of Article 9 would have directly completed the normalization trajectory.

Conversely, under the non-favorable political condition, Abe attempted to transfer the public's concern to the relatively modest and practical economic area. On 16 July 2015, when the security bills accompanied by a controversial collective self-defense right finally passed in the Lower House, Abe reached political crisis without precedent in his second term. A number of the Japanese people, including constitutional scholars, the opposition parties' politicians, college students, and general citizens, protested against the

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<sup>113</sup> Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe," 1 July 2014.

<sup>114</sup> "The Constitution of Japan," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution\\_and\\_government\\_of\\_japan/constitution\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html).

<sup>115</sup> Clint Richards, "New Komeito Fighting Back on Collective Self-Defense," *The Diplomat*, 10 June 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/new-komeito-fighting-back-on-collective-self-defense/>.

regime. On 14 July, a crowd of nearly 20,000 protesters gathered in Hibiya Park in Tokyo and expressed their opposition to the government's security bills.<sup>116</sup> At this point, Abe's approval ratings were the lowest of his second tenure. According to the poll on 19 July, Abe's disapproval ratings were higher than his approval ratings for the first time in the second term (36.1 percent of approval and 47.0 percent of disapproval).<sup>117</sup> Almost all of the opposed people were unsatisfied with the cabinet's insufficient explanation of the package of security bills. This protest continued for a while even after the security bills were passed as law by the Upper House on 19 September.

Abe, then, immediately changed his agenda from security to the economic domain. In the beginning of October, Abe held press conferences for two consecutive days and appealed to the people to focus his and his cabinet's energy on economy revitalization. On 6 October 2015, Abe announced an agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and emphasized that Japan would have an unprecedented scale of economic zone, including nearly 40 percent of the huge global economy with 800 million people.<sup>118</sup> Abe asserted that TPP would provide Japan with a new opportunity for economic growth and a new engine for escaping from deflation; thus, the Japanese people should move forward on the new challenges.<sup>119</sup> The next day, on 7 October, Abe announced the upgraded Abenomics by presenting his "100 million Japanese citizens' active roles" plan:

I will fire my new "three arrows" forcefully, seeking to attain the three major targets of raising GDP to 600 trillion yen, our largest in the post-war era; raising the birthrate to 1.8 children per woman, which is the level the public has indicated as desirable; and eliminating cases in which people

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<sup>116</sup> Sheila A. Smith, "US-Japan Relations: History and Other Alliance Constraints," *Comparative Connections* 17.2 (September 2015), 24.

<sup>117</sup> "2015nen 7gatsu chosa" [2015 July Poll], *TV Asahi*, July 2015, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/201507/index.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Shinzo Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe," (speech, the press conference, 6 October 2015), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/statement/201510/1213579\\_9930.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201510/1213579_9930.html).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

have no choice but to leave their jobs to provide nursing care. I believe we have succeeded in preparing a robust structure for achieving this.<sup>120</sup>

Abe suggested a strengthening supply-based economic policy for preventing an absence of labor forces and preparing long term social issues, including low birth rate and an aging society. Through the newer plan, Abe intended that Japan would be more productive by maintaining a population of 100 million even 50 years later and would achieve a sustainable economy.

In order to resolve the current situation, Abe's choice of economic-centric approach was successful in recovering his approval ratings. According to an *Asahi* poll about the cabinet, the lowest support rating around the security bills from July to September showed a reverse course in October (42.2 percent approval and 41.0 percent disapproval) and returned to a stable condition again in December (47.3 percent approval and 33.3 percent disapproval).<sup>121</sup> Consequently, Abe's economic card was successful to transcend the most severe political crisis in his second term. In order to fulfill both economic and security goals, the second Abe administration pursued a strategic and pragmatic approach in dealing with political choices. More sensitive security policy was applied when the political indicators showed relatively stable while economic policy was emphasized when the political condition was relatively unstable, all with the purpose of regaining credibility for the cabinet. Putting it differently, the second Abe administration showed a policy flexibility in choosing cabinet decisions based on the political indicators.

### C. ABE'S MOTIVATION FOR THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Why did Abe adopt a new pragmatic approach? In his first tenure, Abe's uncompromising political style did not stop him even in the face of declining approval ratings toward the cabinet. During the first tenure, Abe showed a tendency to fix his own philosophy. He described this idea well in his book by depicting the "fighting politician"

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<sup>120</sup> Shinzo Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe," (speech, the press conference, 7 October 2015), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/statement/201510/1213721\\_9930.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201510/1213721_9930.html).

<sup>121</sup> "2015nen 10gatsu chosa" [2015 October Poll], *TV Asahi*, October 2015, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/201510/index.html>; "2015nen 12gatsu chosa" [2015 December Poll], *TV Asahi*, December 2015, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/201512/index.html>.



as the self-portrait he was aiming for.<sup>122</sup> A fighting politician would struggle for his own belief and be unperturbed by any confrontation against this belief.<sup>123</sup> Abe's unique stance made it difficult for him to observe a public trend. According to Fujihira, Abe's political style was closer to "top-down" (i.e., exerting his own preference) than "bottom-up" (i.e., persuading the people to the direction of his preference).<sup>124</sup> In the 2007 Upper House election campaign, Abe proved to exert his own idea to the public. Having experiences of diverse scandals such as the government's mishandling of national pensions and corruption of ministers in the cabinet, the disappointed Japanese people wanted the government to return its concern to the economy. Abe stimulated the public's anxieties, however, by presenting a revision of the pacifist constitution as a main campaign slogan, stating: "to pursue reforms, to build a new country, I have to fulfill my duties as prime minister from now on as well."<sup>125</sup> Abe's straightforward political stance implications combined with overconfidence about the LDP support led to a loss of political stability by exposing a gulf between Abe's goals and public opinion.

Conversely, a rapid but significant political success stood in stark contrast to political failure in his former term, and forced Abe to change his political style and adopt pragmatic ways in executing premiership in his second term. Although some people worried about his top-down political style when he was back, strategically, Abe chose a different approach from the past. This is because Abe had learned political lessons from the former and present experiences. Looking back on his political failure in the past, Abe confessed: "Nine years ago as Prime Minister I suffered a crushing defeat in the House of Councilors election that summer, after which I resigned my post as Prime Minister. The setback of that time is still deeply etched into my mind even now."<sup>126</sup> Abe kept his former failure in mind, and this experience made him politically careful. In his second

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<sup>122</sup> Abe, *Utsukushii kuni e [Toward a Beautiful Country]*; Fujihira, "Legacies of the Abe Administration," 9.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Fujihira, "Legacies of the Abe Administration," 9.

<sup>125</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, "Governing Party in Japan Suffers Election Defeat," *New York Times*, 30 July 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/30/world/asia/30japan.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/30/world/asia/30japan.html?_r=0).

<sup>126</sup> Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe," 1 June 2016.

term, Abe did not justify his image as an unwavering conservative revisionist leaning only on a right-wing ideology.<sup>127</sup> Abe tried to listen to more diverse voices of the public, instead of focusing on his own preferences. As Abe became politically mature, his political style also changed from uncompromising to more pragmatic. During the time he spent building up his political capital, Abe refined his approach, evolving and learning the benefits of flexibility and compromise. These changes were the central motivation to lead his relative success in his second tenure. Sometimes, it is rare and risky for a politician to change his own political style; however, Abe's pragmatic approach was a good fit for the current situation of Japanese politics.

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<sup>127</sup> Curtis, "Abe and the LDP Are Back."

## **IV. DOMESTIC POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT**

While Abe's pragmatic political shift made him strong enough to build up his political capital for his premiership, his degree of success was also contingent on changes in the political environment. Favorable domestic political environments helped Abe's political success. In this chapter, I will examine the elements that enabled Abe's achievements in his second administration: the political influence of former administrations, Abe's strong position within the LDP, weak opposition party, and economic downturn.

### **A. POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF FORMER ADMINISTRATIONS**

Since electoral reform in the 1990s, the political structure in Japan had experienced a transition to reduce factional power within the LDP, and public approval had become more of a determining factor for political stability of the cabinet. As discussed earlier in the literature review, political factions were traditionally the crucial factor in selecting the LDP president, and a prime minister was more affected by support of these factions than by approval of the public.<sup>128</sup> The electoral reform in the 1990s changed this political trend, however. In the 2000s in particular, the political legacy of the Koizumi administration had one of the most significant political impacts in weakening the role of factions in power dynamics within the LDP.<sup>129</sup> Koizumi was able to create prime minister-centric political self-reliance on the basis of public approval and without factional political cooperation. As a result, he was able to survive power competition within the LDP. Michael J. Green depicted this change of power dynamics in Japanese politics before and after Koizumi as follows: "Before Koizumi, a Japanese prime minister could survive with relatively low public support by relying on the factions that put him in office in the first place. But Koizumi dealt a body blow to factions and made public polling a critical indicator of the political strength of the prime minister."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Mark Mohr, "Japan's Political Mess: Abe Failed, Can Fukuda Do Better?" *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Asia Program Special Report* 139, (January 2008): 1–2.

<sup>129</sup> Pekkanen, "What Is Koizumi's Legacy?" 5.

<sup>130</sup> Green, "US-Japan Relation: An Unexpected Rough Patch."

This legacy enabled prime ministers to have more political freedom from factions; at the same time, this meant a prime minister would conduct state affairs based upon an unstable political structure if he failed to prove his political leadership. With this political change, Kim and Park survey the correlation between approval rating of the cabinet and the terms of Prime Ministers:

In the intra-party level, the power of party faction diminished in selecting Prime Minister. In the inter-party level, the number of voters of no party identification increased. Eventually, there was no solid mechanism of gaining voters in Japanese politics. Under the circumstance, the rate of voter's support, especially for Prime Minister and his cabinet, began to matter. The rate repeatedly moved from high at the beginning of Prime Ministership to low because of whimsical voters' preference. This eventually resulted in the remarkably unstable Prime Ministership, which interrupted and shortened the terms of Prime Ministership in Japan.<sup>131</sup>

In reality, as shown in Table 5, many prime ministers who were damaged by low approval ratings of the cabinet did not complete their terms in office after Koizumi:

Table 5. Term of Prime Minister in Japan after 2000<sup>132</sup>

<b>Prime Minister</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Begin</b>	<b>End</b>
Junichiro Koizumi	2001–2006	LDP	78%	46.9%
Shinzo Abe	2006–2007	LDP	70.5%	24.3%
Yasuo Fukuda	2007–2008	LDP	56.8%	33.9%
Taro Aso	2008–2009	LDP	50.4%	21.5%
Yukio Hatoyama	2009–2010	DPJ	72.4%	20.5%
Naoto Kan	2010–2011	DPJ	58.7%	16.4%
Yoshihiko Noda	2011–2012	DPJ	54.6%	19.4%
Shinzo Abe	2012–	LDP	62.4%	48.5% (Sep.)

Between Koizumi and Abe's second administration, six prime ministers were replaced, and their average term in office was just over one year. These short-term prime ministers had in common low approval ratings by the end of their term. The second Abe

<sup>131</sup> Kim and Park, "Political Change and the Terms of Prime Minister in Japan: From Political Faction to Support Rate,"<sup>132</sup>.

<sup>132</sup> "Naikaku sijiritsu no suii" [Changes of Support Ratings toward the Cabinet], *TV Asahi*, April 2001–September 2016, [http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/graph\\_naikaku.html](http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/graph_naikaku.html).

administration, however, maintained generally strong approval ratings during over four years of his term in office, although there was a period of fluctuation. As stated above, Abe's new pragmatic approach in the second administration was effective in maintaining stable approval rating by targeting the elections and public opinion. Abe has shown flexibility in applying policy and a respectful attitude to the public opinion rather than shaping a strong and uncompromising political image. Behind this, Abe's skilled capabilities contributed to a detailed political calculation of interpreting political trends, capturing opportunities and timing, and applying his policies appropriately. As a result, these pragmatic characteristics were helpful to consolidate political stability of his second tenure.

Since these changes to the role of factional power and relative increased prime minister's leadership were already apparent under Koizumi, it is reasonable to ask why Abe did not apply strategic and pragmatic management in his first administration. The fact he did not can be attributed to different contexts of the political capital that Abe possessed when he took power.

In the first administration, Abe had overconfidence in his high popularity with the public, mostly based on Koizumi's political platform; therefore, Abe did not catch up with new political trends. At the start of his first tenure, Abe's political platform was not poor. As Abe was a successor to Koizumi, he already held a strong position as a prime minister because the LDP controlled both houses as a ruling party. In addition, the main opposition party, the DPJ, was relatively weak due to the popularity of the former government. Abe assumed that this support for the LDP extended automatically to him. Ironically, favorable political capital inherited from the former cabinet became a poison to Abe. In fact, this political asset and support had been built by the party under Koizumi. Obviously, Abe was the most promising successor in the Koizumi cabinet. He did not, however, understand the change of political trends under Koizumi such as weakened factions, a more significant cabinet, and the more prominent role of prime minister in elections.<sup>133</sup> Abe's leadership in his first tenure conflicted with a new Japanese

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<sup>133</sup> Pekkanen, "What Is Koizumi's Legacy?" 8.

institutional environment that had changed since the electoral reform and deepened under Koizumi.<sup>134</sup> A series of political scandals of ministers who were appointed by Abe considerably undermined the credibility of the cabinet. Abe's aggressive ideological agenda in the election was also given unkind treatment by the Japanese people. In this way, Abe assumed he had more credibility with the people than he actually did.

By escaping from Koizumi's political shadow, Abe led his second administration to a different outcome. Abe begun to create his own success story when he became prime minister again. In this time, relatively weak political assets provided Abe with an opportunity to listen to the voices of the Japanese people. Abe had no choice but to build up his political capital from zero political bases because, unlike his first tenure, the inter-party power structure was drastically changed. Since he had left office, the DPJ had gotten stronger while his party, the LDP, was getting weaker. In 2009, when the DPJ achieved a turnover of power from the LDP, both houses were ruled by the DPJ's rule while the LDP tumbled down to opposition party status for only the second time in post-war history. The DPJ's rule did not last for long, however. In 2012, the LDP was successful in regaining power by winning in the general election. Abe's new economic thesis, Abenomics (his political trademark, as stated in the economic section), had a positive influence on his second tenure. Although Abe was still under pressure because he had no majority in the Upper House, he thoroughly focused his economic agenda to appeal to the public in the election. Finally, he successfully cemented credibility among the people by securing both houses within just one year after he was inaugurated in office. Through the process of taking back power from the DPJ, Abe became the main figure to lay a new political foundation of the LDP within domestic power dynamics. For conservatives, Abe was a hero, taking the LDP back to political prominence; therefore, Abe's reputation within the LDP naturally strengthened. His overwhelming position in the party originated within the public. Abe constructed a stronger political position as prime minister than any other leading politician of the LDP in recent years.<sup>135</sup> In this

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<sup>134</sup> Fujihira, "Legacies of the Abe Administration," 9.

<sup>135</sup> Curtis, "Abe and the LDP Are Back."

way, different political conditions between the two tenures led Abe to learn how to achieve political success.

## **B. ABE'S STRONG POSITION WITHIN THE LDP**

Although Abe became president of the LDP as successor to Koizumi in 2006, his popularity was not overwhelming. On 20 September 2006, Abe won the presidential election by defeating two candidates, Foreign Minister Aso Taro and Finance Minister Tanigaki Sadakazu. On one hand, Abe's fresh image as a young prime minister and his dignified tone in dealing with the North Korean abduction issue appealed to the voters within the party.<sup>136</sup> On the other hand, Abe's popularity also stemmed from the absence of veteran politician Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda Yasuo in the presidential race, one of the top competitors of Abe, who gave up his challenge to be president.<sup>137</sup> In the party, there were still more high-ranking elite politicians besides Abe. Aware of his dropping approval ratings, Abe announced his resignation from the office in September 2007. In turn, both Fukuda and Aso became successive prime ministers. The younger Abe was a good weapon for appealing to the party supporters; conversely, he still revealed a politically weak support base within the party by failing fully to recover his political position.

Since 2012, no strong competitors against Abe have come forward in the LDP. Abe maneuvered Ishiba Shigeru, his main rival in the 2012 president election, out of his position as the LDP Secretary General in the 2014 September cabinet reshuffle.<sup>138</sup> Abe was able to continue his presidency of the party since there were no candidates in the 2015 presidential election. Thus, Abe became the main figure in the revival of the LDP's dominance in elections, based on his political capital and premiership. Abe led his party four times to victory – in all elections during his second tenure – and still maintains a

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<sup>136</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Enter Abe Stage Right," *Comparative Connections* 8.3 (October 2006).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Robert J. Pekkanen and Saadia M. Pekkanen, "All about Abe," *Asian Survey* 55, No. 1 (January/February 2015): 104–5.

good level of approval. Since there are no alternative leaders within the party, the LDP cannot ignore Abe's popularity. Figure 4 shows recent approval ratings of Abe's cabinet.

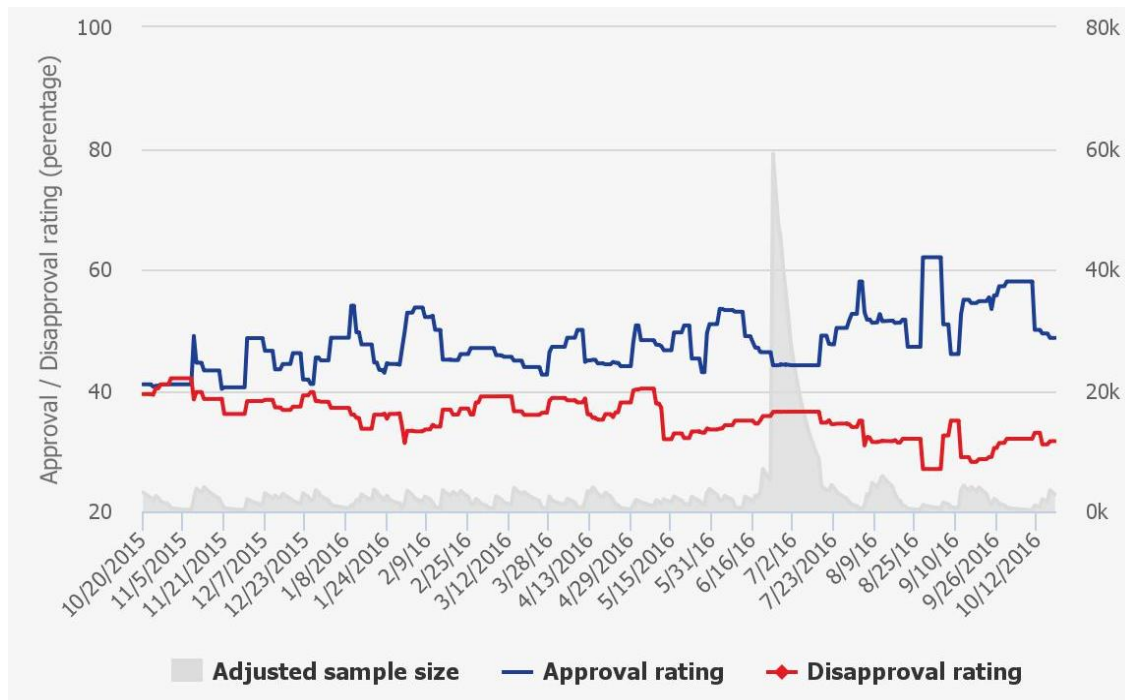


Figure 4. The Approval and Disapproval Ratings of Prime Minister Abe's Cabinet<sup>139</sup>

Abe demonstrated his political maturity through satisfying his conservative supporters and showing restraint in ideological displays to keep broader support. Abe has satisfied the needs of conservatives within the party and support groups for the party. Conservative political performance also has a significant role in strengthening his position in the party. Abe's achievement in the security domain during the second tenure has fulfilled much of what the conservative groups want. Surprisingly, Abe waited on his conservative movement until achieving political stability in summer election in 2013; then, he visited Yasukuni in December. Abe frequently showed his positive thinking about shrine visits to those conservative groups by visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, and showing his willingness to venerate those who died in fighting for Japan. Since Abe

<sup>139</sup> Source from Tobias Harris, "Japan Political Pulse," *Sasakawa USA*, 21 September 2016, <http://spfusa.org/category/japan-political-pulse/>.



visited Yasukuni again in 2013, he keeps sending annual ritual offering to Yasukuni Shrine. Many former prime ministers gave up visits to Yasukuni Shrine due to the negative response from the Chinese and South Korean governments; Abe overcame these precedents, however, by accumulating a sufficient popularity to withstand “domestic backlash.”<sup>140</sup> This made stronger ties between Abe and conservative groups.<sup>141</sup> Besides, Abe also seemed to target conservative favorites such as a Secrets Protection Law and collective self-defense bill.<sup>142</sup> By doing so, Abe was able to capture unwavering support within the conservative groups to support the LDP.

Abe’s strong leadership within the party seems to be continuing. The LDP officially announced its decision to amend its party rules concerning the maximum tenure of the LDP president from six to nine years, providing Abe with the opportunity to extend his current tenure as a prime minister to 2021 if he were to win the presidential election in 2018.<sup>143</sup> This amendment of presidential term length actually ensures a high possibility that Abe would be a unilateral candidate in the next presidential election within the party. Abe also created more time to adopt the amendment of Article 9, which would fulfill both Abe and the LDP’s long-cherished wish.

### **C. WEAK OPPOSITION PARTIES**

Abe’s first term was marked by rising support for the DPJ, caused by a combination of disappointment in the LDP’s dominance and hope for change from the opposition party. As discussed earlier, the LDP had suffered from an absence of strong leaders since Koizumi’s retirement. The following LDP presidents (Abe, Fukuda, and Aso) failed to ensure political credibility; as a result, the LDP repeatedly replaced the leader of the party whenever prime ministers had lost their popularity. As a result, the public was disappointed with the LDP due to the instability of its leadership. The

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<sup>140</sup> M. Erika Pollmann, “The Politics of Visiting the Yasukuni Shrine: Explaining Japanese Politician’s Behaviors,” *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs* (Winter 2016): 148.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>142</sup> Robert Pekkanen and Saadia Pekkanen, “All about Abe,” 107.

<sup>143</sup> Tomohiro Osaki, “In Boon for Abe, LDP Officially Signs off on Extending President’s Term,” *The Japanese Times*, 26 October 2016, [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/26/national/politics-diplomacy/boon-abe-ldp-officially-signs-off-extending-presidents-term/#.WBEn\\_9UrLcs](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/10/26/national/politics-diplomacy/boon-abe-ldp-officially-signs-off-extending-presidents-term/#.WBEn_9UrLcs).

symptoms of the disappointment began from the Abe administration by losing his position early. By showing a lower level of performance in economic reform and relatively more focus on ideological issues, Abe failed to hold people's interest. A series of scandals of cabinet ministers and the pension scandal of the ruling LDP heightened the public's disappointment. As a result, the cabinet was overthrown in less than a year. Conversely, the DPJ could take relative benefit from the unpopularity of the LDP leaders in the post-Koizumi era.<sup>144</sup> The public showed its political preference for a compelling alternative to the LDP. This expectation was linked to the rise of the DPJ in the 2007 Upper House election. Ozawa Ichiro, the leader of the DPJ, tried to earn public credibility not only from the city but also from rural areas that had been traditionally strong areas of the LDP, while emphasizing Abe's lack of commitment to the Japanese people's concerns.<sup>145</sup> In addition, the DPJ's election strategy was not only to show criticism of the LDP as an opposition party but also to promote its capability as a new governing party.<sup>146</sup> These strategies hit the mark in the election, as the DPJ secured a majority in the Upper House for the first time in history. Tobias Harris also evaluated the DPJ's victory as follows: "The DPJ forged a national brand, based upon the party's manifesto. Regardless of the district, DPJ candidates campaigned on the same agenda. Unlike the LDP, the DPJ waged a relentlessly positive campaign, focused on its own policy proposals instead of criticism of LDP rule."<sup>147</sup> Mixed effects of frustration over the LDP and the rise of the DPJ increased the DPJ's political reputation as a possible political replacement for the LDP. In 2009, the DPJ finally became a ruling party by defeating the LDP in the general election. Figure 5 shows approval ratings of the two parties.

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<sup>144</sup> Ronald J. Hrebenar and Koji Haraguchi, "The Politics of Failure: The Rise and Fall of the Democratic Party in Japan, 2009–2013" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Western Political Science Association, Los Angeles, 28–30 March 2013) 3.

<sup>145</sup> Green, "US-Japan Relations: Enter Abe Stage Right."

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Tobias Harris, "How Will The DPJ Change Japan?" *Naval War College Review* 63, No. 1, (2010): 79.

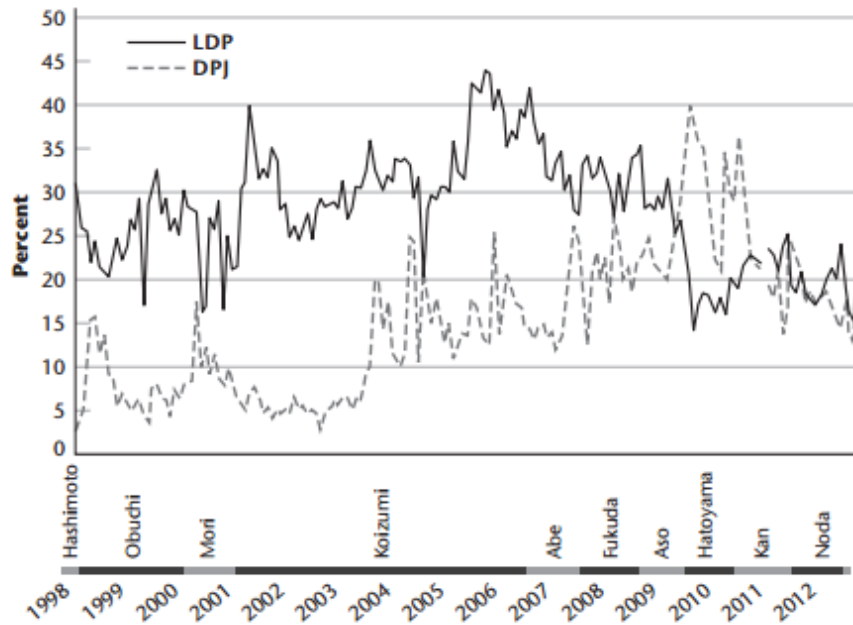


Figure 5. Approval Ratings of the LDP and the DPJ, 1998–2012<sup>148</sup>

Opposition party weakness contributed to Abe’s being more successful during the second tenure. The decline of the DPJ, the ruling party from 2009 to 2012, was one of the most significant reasons behind the LDP’s win in elections. Fragmentation among the opposition parties also helped the sole lead of the Abe administration in Japan. Thus, whether the coalition of the opposition parties can recover its credibility should be one of the main factors to both Abe’s continued political success and the LDP’s further dominance in Japan.

The lack of popularity of the DPJ mostly originated from its governing experience as the ruling regime from 2009 to 2012. The DPJ’s leaders tried to apply various measures contrary to the LDP for shaping a new Japan; the decisive weak point of the DPJ, however, was the party’s lack of experience in governing the state. During the three years of DPJ rule, the party revealed a lack of adequate leadership, an absence of coordination with bureaucrats in the government, insufficient governmental role as a control tower in facing natural disasters, and insufficient consultation over what became

<sup>148</sup> Source from Kenji E. Kushida and Phillip Y. Lipsy, *Japan under the DPJ: The Politics of Transition and Governance*, Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2013, 15.

unilateral policies. Hatoyama Yukio, the first prime minister from the DPJ, showed a lack of policy coordination within the government as well as with its US ally. For example, Hatoyama promised to construct a “close and equal Japan-US alliance” by explaining his basic policies.<sup>149</sup> A specific policy of this agenda was relocation of the Futenma Air Station, a main overseas facility of the U.S. Marine Corps, outside Okinawa. Negotiations with the United States did not proceed smoothly, however, revealing systemic trouble within the Japanese government between party politicians and bureaucrats. In dealing with this issue, the DPJ was known to exclude foreign and defense bureaucrats from the government levels of the policymaking process.<sup>150</sup> In the end, Hatoyama withdrew his original plan of relocating Futenma Air Base. Yuki Tatsumi pointed out the incapability of Hatoyama’s cabinet to promote policy: “The lack of consensus within the party over its basic policies has prevented the DPJ from unifying its policy positions, rendering it ineffective in advancing the legislation needed to achieve its policy goals.”<sup>151</sup>

The DPJ’s incapability was even more obvious during the catastrophic natural disaster of the Great Tohoku Earthquake on 11 March 2011. The government failed to proactively control the Fukushima nuclear plant in a timely and appropriate manner. Rather, the government played a blame game with Tokyo Electric, the owner of the nuclear site, and showed dissonance even while a number of the local people in the accident area were in danger.<sup>152</sup> Through the Fukushima crisis, the DPJ revealed its vulnerability in working with industry, and this reminded the public of the much better coordination in the LDP government: “One would think the DPJ could have steered the blame for the Fukushima disasters on the long time ruling party, the LDP that had very close ties to the industry and the bureaucracy that was supposed to supervise the industry

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<sup>149</sup> Yukio Hatoyama, “Basic Policies of the Hatoyama Government,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 16 September 2009, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/hatoyama/statement/200909/16policies\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/hatoyama/statement/200909/16policies_e.html).

<sup>150</sup> Hrebenar and Haraguchi, “The Politics of Failure,” 8.

<sup>151</sup> Yuki Tatsumi, “Japan under DPJ Rule: The Costs of Overemphasizing Political Leadership,” *Harvard International Review* 34:3 (Winter 2013): 58.

<sup>152</sup> Hrebenar and Haraguchi, “The Politics of Failure,” 11.

and prevent problems like those of March 11th.”<sup>153</sup> Prime Minister Kan Naoto had lost an opportunity to demonstrate his leadership by mishandling the crisis response. Gerald Curtis identified a political disaster under the three years of the DPJ rule, and he found several causes:

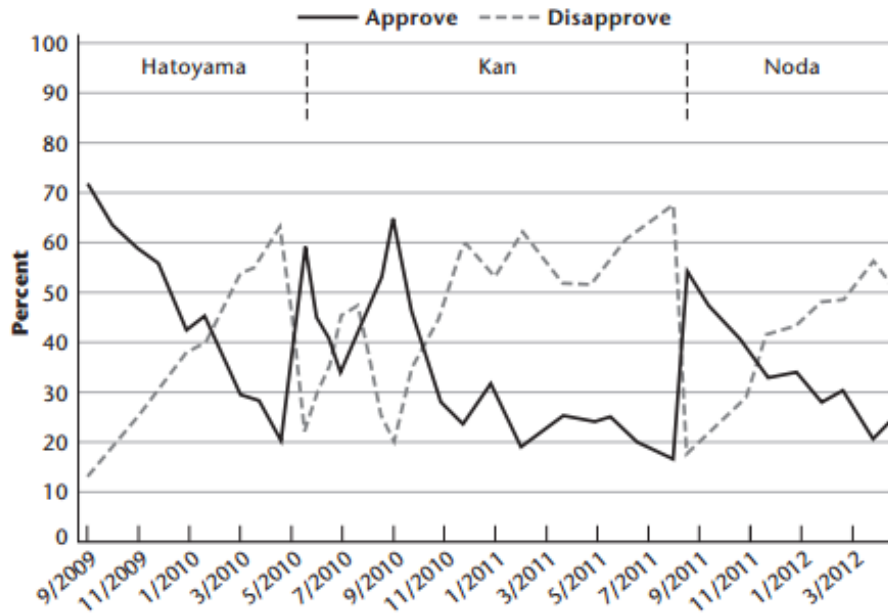
Many factors contributed to the DPJ’s failure, among the most important being the ineptitude of prime minister Yukio Hatoyama, the effort by Ichiro Ozawa to control the party, the party’s bureaucrat-bashing approach, poor handling of the crises created by the Tohoku earthquake and the nuclear disaster at Fukushima. It looked as though the party might be getting its bearings under prime minister Yoshihiko Noda, but by then it was too late.<sup>154</sup>

Ultimately, Noda, a successor to Kan, lost the DPJ’s governing power by failing in a 2012 snap election called for the consumption tax rise to 10 percent. During the three years of DPJ rule, the government generally showed political weakness in domestic politics and economy, security and foreign affairs, and more importantly in failing to improve morale of the public. Figure 6 shows the approval ratings of the DPJ prime ministers.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Gerald Curtis, “Weak Opposition is a Cancer in Japan’s Political System,” *East Asia Forum*, 18 September 2016, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/09/18/weak-opposition-is-a-cancer-in-japans-political-system/>.



The Japanese people are still ostracizing the DPJ due to a negative image of its political capability. The DPJ failed to satisfy the Japanese high expectations by showing no transformative policy changes.<sup>156</sup> As a result, all DPJ prime ministers—Hatoyama, Kan, and Noda—fell to the same destiny as the post-Koizumi LDP leaders, without having any political impact as an alternative leadership. The Japanese people seemed to have a sense of deep betrayal about their expectations toward the DPJ when the DPJ proved its political incapability during its time in power. This negative image of the DPJ seemed hard to escape under the second Abe administration.

The DPJ's lack of popularity limited voters' options in choosing political alternatives to the second Abe administration. In 2012, the LDP returned to power, and the DPJ never won any further elections. These failures were mostly attributed to the

<sup>155</sup> Source from Kenji E. Kushida and Kay Shimizu, “Overview: Japan’s Political and Economic Transformations Since the 1990s,” in *Syncretism: The Politics of Economic Restructuring and System Reform in Japan*, ed. Kenji E. Kushida et al. (Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2013), 17, [https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Syncretism\\_online\\_second\\_chapter.pdf](https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Syncretism_online_second_chapter.pdf).

<sup>156</sup> Phillip Y. Lipscy and Ethan Scheiner, "Japan Under the DPJ: The Paradox of Political Change Without Policy Change," *Journal of East Asian Studies* (2012): 311.

DPJ's lack of popularity among voters. For example, Banri Kaieda, the president of the DPJ from 2012 to 2014, lost his district seat in the Lower House election in December 2014. Soon after, Kaieda decided to resign from his office. This was a huge humiliation for the DPJ and a reflection of people's frustration toward the main opposition party.<sup>157</sup> Katsuya Okada, the next leader of the DPJ, failed to increase the DPJ's approval ratings even when given an opportunity upon Abe's facing severe protest from the public due to the collective self-defense bill. In September 2015, when the collective self-defense bill was approved by the diet, the government lost almost 7.2 percent of its approval rating (from 46 percent to 38.8 percent), and the DPJ gained just 3.8 percent in its approval rating (from 12.4 percent to 16.2 percent).<sup>158</sup> The DPJ continued to mark average approval ratings almost below 15 percent since Abe took power, and even early in 2016 the DPJ still showed only 14.6 percent popularity.<sup>159</sup>

Fragmentation among the opposition parties also contributed to the dominance of the LDP. A split in the opposition parties in the present party structure gave the LDP political advantages. From 2009 to 2013, the Japanese two-party system collapsed by splintering into 13 parties: four major parties, four minor parties, and five micro parties.<sup>160</sup> The opposition parties promptly fell into a trap due to the chaotic political situation that had created them. Each candidate from the opposition parties had to compete against the LDP and other parties as well. It seemed also difficult to make coalitions among the opposition parties, with their diverse political identities, to win a district seats. The splits in the opposition parties have kept them from gaining political credibility from the Japanese, even when Abe was met with political crisis in keeping his hard stance on security policy. The public seemed to judge that the opposition parties were not viable political alternatives to Abe's administration and the LDP. As shown in Figure 7, the split in the opposition parties helped keep them from threatening the LDP's dominance. Institutionally, it seems difficult to change the present electoral system.

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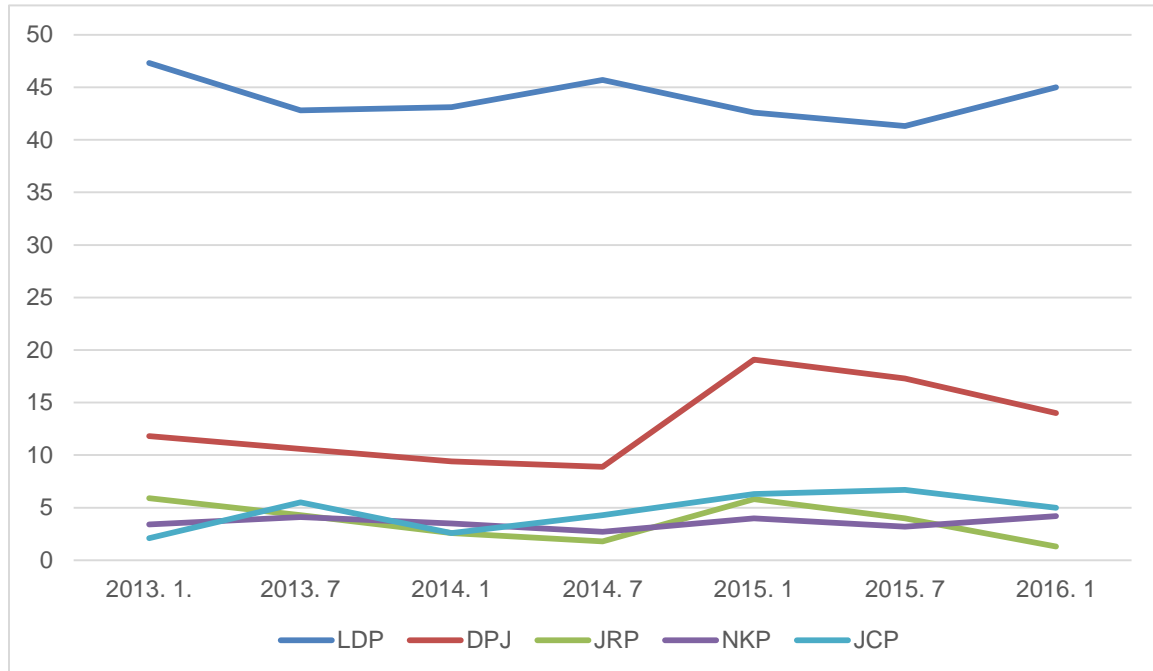
<sup>157</sup> Robert Pekkanen and Saadia Pekkanen, "All about Abe," 106.

<sup>158</sup> "Naikaku sijiritsu no suii" [Changes of Support Ratings toward the Cabinet].

<sup>159</sup> "2016nen 2gatsu chosa" [2016 February Poll], *TV Asahi*, February 2016, <http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/201602/index.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Hrebendar and Haraguchi, "The Politics of Failure," 4.

Therefore, for survival in elections, it seems essential to make strong coalitions or at least to identify joint opposition candidates in electoral districts.



\*JRP: Restoration Party, NKP: New Komeito Party, and JCP: Communist Party

\*\*The LDP and NKP form the ruling coalition

Figure 7. The Japanese Main Political Parties' Approval Ratings: 2013–2016<sup>161</sup>

The DPJ's and Japan Innovation Party (JIP)'s leaders have made an effort to create a large opposition coalition against the LDP; a new coalition would still face obstacles, however. In early 2016, a leaders meeting of the DPJ and the JIP suggested the two parties merge and pursue a new political movement. On 27 March, the DPJ and the JIP announced the creation of a new coalition party, the Democratic Party (DP). This agreement made one potential threat to the LDP's dominance because the DP aimed to prevent the LDP's further dominance in the July Upper House election.<sup>162</sup> The DP failed

<sup>161</sup> Source adapted from "Seitou sijiritsu no suii" [Changes of Support Ratings of the Parties], *TV Asahi*, January 2013–September 2016, [http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/graph\\_seitou.html](http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/hst/poll/graph_seitou.html).

<sup>162</sup> "DPJ, Japan Innovation Party to Merge ahead of Upper House Election," *The Asahi Shimbun*, 24 February 2016, [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind\\_news/politics/AJ201602240068](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201602240068).



to refresh its image among voters, however. Rather, the DP lost 13 seats, going from 62 to 49 in the House of Councilors. For the DP, two main hurdles remain. First, although both parties agreed to merge, the sum of both parties' Diet members is wanting in ability against the ruling coalition of the LDP and the Komeito. Under the current situation, it is impossible to threaten the ruling coalition with reasonable actions. Second, it is still unclear how the new party would be shaped. If they cannot prove to be a viable political alternative (i.e., if their new political platform does not appeal to the Japanese people), it will continue to be difficult to win elections. The most significant challenge of the DP is how to integrate into a single, united voice. The DP must skillfully manage its broad and diverse political spectrum. The DP should overcome this constraint within the party and align their party's unified interests to the public's concerns in order to compete with the LDP. If the new opposition coalition cannot play a political role of checks and balances against the ruling regime to a certain extent, the Abe administration can make its continued political dominance more likely.

#### **D. ECONOMIC DOWNTURN**

There is no doubt that economic revitalization is significant for Japan due to its long-lasting stagnation since the 1990s. During the period between the two Abe administrations, the Japanese economic situation continued to worsen. The domestically complex political economic situation was intertwined with the global economic crisis, however. This forced a search for solutions to the economic stagnation.

Political instability of the ruling LDP kept it from continuing its strong economic reform drive in the post-Koizumi era. While Koizumi made an effort toward economic reforms and strengthening neoliberal policies, his change did not firmly hold. Post-Koizumi politicians could not maintain strong economic reform policies because they did not have sufficient approval from the public. As a result, no consistent and clear-cut policy was pursued by the post-Koizumi governments, making the Japanese economic situation more difficult.

To make matters worse, the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 prevented economic recovery and prolonged Japan's long

stagnation. As the GFC had struck at global capital markets, including those of the United States and Europe, by damaging financial infrastructures, Japan also took an economic blow.<sup>163</sup> In particular, a downturn in global trade resulting from the GFC had a negative impact on the Japanese economy.<sup>164</sup> This is because Japanese industries are mainly supported by a trade-oriented economic infrastructure. Japan's GDP in the first quarter of 2009 sharply declined by almost four percent.<sup>165</sup> In 2008 and 2009, the government launched extensive monetary and fiscal policy measures representing 27.4 trillion yen; consequently, the national financing deficit increased, and fiscal regulation became weak.<sup>166</sup> In addition to the GFC, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake was an economic burden. The shock of the great natural disaster constricted not only economic optimism among consumers but also fiscal sustainability. The economic index showed negative growth and the government could not help but spend on revitalization of the East Japan local area.<sup>167</sup> Continued unfavorable factors led the Japanese people to perceive some amount of economic and psychological chaos.

Most important, because power shifted back and forth between the LDP and DPJ, it was not possible to propel a coherent economic policy and, therefore, also difficult to achieve economic efficiency. Japan's developmental state had been known as an "East Asia Miracle."<sup>168</sup> Its model was based on state-led intervention in the economy under a long-lasting single dominant ruling regime.<sup>169</sup> In other words, Japanese economic success has most likely been influenced by political stability that pursued the optimal balance between coherent policy-oriented governmental efforts and the market economy. Consistent and stable economic discipline facilitated cooperation of bureaucratic elites and capital, which led to an efficient business relationship. Since the 1990s, however, this

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<sup>163</sup> T.J. Pempel and Keiichi Tsunekawa, eds. *Two Crises, Different Outcomes: East Asia and Global Finance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 202.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Looney, "Japan Economy."

<sup>166</sup> Pempel and Tsunekawa, *Two Crises, Different Outcomes*, 202–3; Looney, "Japan Economy."

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Pempel and Tsunekawa, *Two Crises, Different Outcomes*, 22.

<sup>169</sup> Dwight H. Perkins, Steven Radelet, and David L. Lindauer, *Economics of Development* (Norton, 2006), 179.

economic virtuous circle has changed to a vicious circle between regime change and economic downturn. Contrary to Japan's political stability in the twentieth century under LDP rule, in the twenty-first century the Japanese economic structure has suffered from a less stable political structure, as the regime has changed twice. Past coherent economic policy disappeared each time the regime changed. Frequent replacement of leadership worries individual business actors enough that it can affect economic development for the future. The uncertainty of the overall economic situation damaged core economic factors, including producers, investors, and consumers, and thus reduced the positive prospects of the Japanese economy.<sup>170</sup> Under these conditions, the Japanese people seemed too long for strong leadership to escape from the vicious economic circle.

In an example of good timing, Abe's strong economic drive, Abenomics, matched the desires of the public for economic improvement. As mentioned earlier, Abe prepared a new government-oriented economic policy, including monetary stimulus, fiscal stimulus, and structural reform. Although several fiscal stimuli had occurred since Japan's bubble economy, all these trials were short-term policy. In contrast, Abenomics accompanied unprecedented monetary and fiscal stimulus. Abe's strong economic drive aroused the public's interest in the economy by providing positive outcomes in a short time. The Japanese people approved of his economic policy through elections. Also, during the first year of his second tenure, Abe created a dependable economic structure to promote consistent economic policy without political vacillation. Regardless of Abenomics' success, there currently do not appear to be any other economic options. Knowing this well, Abe stated in a press conference when he announced the consumption tax rise postponement, "There are now criticisms against Abenomics that it has been a failure, or that it is not going well. However, if that is the case, then what should be done instead?"<sup>171</sup> Judging Abenomics' success is still difficult. Unlike during his former tenure, however, Abe has kept promoting Abenomics with strong volition during the last three years. Also, the public does not want to prevent him from working on it because the

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<sup>170</sup> Pempel and Tsunekawa, *Two Crises, Different Outcomes*, 206.

<sup>171</sup> Shinzo Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe," (speech, the press conference, 18 November 2014), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201411/1118kaiken.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201411/1118kaiken.html).

people's belief in the DPJ has been shattered; there is no alternative to Abenomics, and Abe still shows his high commitment to economic revitalization.

## **V. REGIONAL POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT**

With political uncertainty such as the rise of China and North Korea's bolder provocations increasing instability in Northeast Asia, Abe's degree of success was also contingent on changes in the regional environment. In this chapter, I will examine how skillfully Abe strengthened security policy by handling regional circumstances in his second administration, focusing on the U.S.-Japan alliance, China, and the Korean Peninsula.

### **A. THE STRONGER U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE**

Abe has preferred to consolidate the strong relationship with the United States during both tenures because support for the U.S.-Japan alliance is his basic foreign policy stance. Abe has shown a tendency to develop foreign and security policies with coordination through the U.S.-Japan alliance. Abe's aggressive domestic policy and the sudden collapse of his approval ratings, however, undermined his attempt to facilitate the U.S.-Japan alliance in his first administration. In his second administration, with political uncertainty such as the rise of China and North Korea's bolder provocations increasing instability in Northeast Asia, Abe's degree of success has also been contingent upon changes in the regional environment. Therefore, the combination of U.S. strategy for the region and Abe's proactive pacifism in his second administration promoted shared interests. In this section, I will examine the shift of U.S. strategic requirements and Abe's security policy development.

#### **1. Changes in U.S. Strategic Requirements in the Asia-Pacific**

After Abe resigned as prime minister in 2007, the United States rebuilt its grand strategy to sustain its global leadership. President Obama presented a new national strategy known as the "Pivot to Asia" (or "Rebalancing toward Asia-Pacific"). In early 2012, after Obama officially declared an end to the Iraq war, he transitioned his national strategy to focus on Asia. Obama presented the goal of U.S. grand strategy as sustaining

U.S. global leadership within global turmoil.<sup>172</sup> One of the fundamental goals of the U.S. strategic shift was to implement a better response to China's emergence as a more influential power in the region.<sup>173</sup> During the last several decades, China's economic power had drastically increased, by almost 10 percent per year, and its economic integration capability deeply penetrated states in the region, changing the geopolitical landscape.<sup>174</sup> Bader infers that Obama's regional strategy is focused largely on China:

Devote a higher priority to the Asia-Pacific region; React in a balanced way to the rise of China; Strengthen alliances and develop new partnerships...Understand that it is impossible to pursue a sound policy without economic recovery at home...Join regional institutions that the United States has stayed apart from; Speak and act with clarity on the universality of human rights while understanding and taking into account the differences between societies.<sup>175</sup>

Based on Obama's rebalancing strategy, the United States influenced the Asian-Pacific region by pressing China and seeking stronger security partnerships.

**a. What Does Japan Bring to the United States?**

These Obama principles of Asian-Pacific strategy revealed implications for the United States that the Japan would be the most favorable strategic partner to facilitate its national interests. For the United States, Japan is the most compelling power to balance China in the region economically, militarily and ideologically.

Economically, as the third largest economy in the world, Japan is still a global economic power, despite recent weak performance. Since 2008, Obama has promoted the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as playing a vital economic role for the United States and the world.<sup>176</sup> By Japan participating in the TPP, the strategic significance of the U.S.-

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<sup>172</sup> Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, January 2012, [http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf).

<sup>173</sup> Mark E. Manyin et al., *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's 'Rebalancing' Toward Asia* (CRS Report No. R42448) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), i, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf>.

<sup>174</sup> Jeffrey A. Bader, *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2012), 2–3.

<sup>175</sup> Bader, *Obama and China's Rise*, 142.

<sup>176</sup> Manyin et al., *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's 'Rebalancing' Toward Asia*, 20.

led new global trade institution would increase.<sup>177</sup> Although the United States did not prevent China from joining TPP, in reality, it was difficult for China to participate in TPP due to its strong tariff elimination schedule.<sup>178</sup> On 4 February 2016, the TPP agreement was signed by 12 Pacific Rim countries, not including China. If the TPP were to be successful, the United States would not only mitigate its economic decline during the last decade but also strengthen its regional primacy.

Militarily, a series of events made the U.S.-Japan alliance stronger. The Japanese self-defense forces (JSDF), especially its naval force, enjoy a certain amount of military capability to balance against potential Chinese assertive behavior in the region. In particular, as China under Xi strongly asserted its maritime sovereignty around the East and South China Seas with rapid military modernization, the U.S. needed to rebalance its military in the Asia-Pacific region. Domestic budgetary pressures, however, worked against the greater requirements of the navy.<sup>179</sup> In the 2012 Strategy Review, it seemed to be difficult to expand the size of the Navy, due to a curtailment in the military budget.<sup>180</sup> Thus, from the U.S. perspective, the JSDF's role relatively increased, especially in the area of naval capability toward maritime strategy. Historically, the United States had led Japanese rearmament to support military operations in the Korean War. During the Cold War, the United States had countered the Soviet Union by deploying its armed forces to Japanese bases. Even during the post-Cold War, the JSDF had evolved to expand its limited use-of-force capability to support the U.S.-Japan alliance. In light of this, the possibility of strengthening U.S.-Japan cooperation in the military domain seemed more likely.

Lastly, the U.S.-Japan alliance would give prominence to a mutual ideological agenda to undermine China's regional influence. Although China has developed

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<sup>177</sup> Manyin et al., *Pivot to the Pacific?* 22.

<sup>178</sup> "Summary of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement," United States Trade Representative (USTR), 4 October 2015, <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2015/october/summary-trans-pacific-partnership>.

<sup>179</sup> Manyin et al., *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's 'Rebalancing' Toward Asia*, 10–15.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

economic and military resources, it is still criticized for universal and important issues such as human rights. The United States and Japan have strongly shared democratic values and rule of law, which can weaken China's authority. From these three points of view, for the United States, Japan's strategic role in the region would be significant to achieve U.S. rebalancing goals.

**b. DPJ Rule: Challenges for U.S. Asia-Pacific Strategy**

From 2009, the DPJ prime ministers, however, shifted their focus toward Asia-centric foreign policy. In particular, Prime Minister Hatoyama professed a different philosophy from the view of the United States. Hatoyama's view of the postwar Japanese foreign policy was that it was excessively dependent on the United States.<sup>181</sup> He thought that the Japanese should determine their security more autonomously.<sup>182</sup> Under his firm vision, Hatoyama had fundamentally reexamined the plan to relocate Marine Corps Ait Station Futenma in Okinawa. Furthermore, Hatoyama wanted to transition Japanese security policy from a U.S.-centric policy to an Asia-centric policy. He strongly respected "East Asian Community" values, especially regarding South Korea and China.<sup>183</sup> Hatoyama's Asia-centric policy considerably challenged U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy.

For the United States, this discrepancy in policies between the U.S. and Japanese government created a greater challenge than ever before. Hatoyama's Asia-centric vision disrupted the U.S. pivot to Asia. Hatoyama's legacies influenced his successor Naoto Kan. Kan announced that he would also continue Hatoyama's diplomatic approach of an Asia-centric foreign policy.<sup>184</sup> Even though the DPJ prime minister changed, Asia-centric foreign policy continued. As a result, U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy was weakened by one of its most favorable allies, Japan, now under DPJ rule.

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<sup>181</sup> Yoshihide Soeya, "Japan's Security Policy toward Northeast Asia and Korea: From Yukio Hatoyama to Naoto Kan," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17.2 (2010): 49.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.



## 2. Abe's Security Revision under the Stronger U.S.-Japan Alliance

Unlike the DPJ's, Abe's security and foreign policy in his second tenure has fit U.S. national interests in the region. On 18 January 2013, Abe revealed the basic foreign policy conditions of his second administration through his speech of Five New Principles for Japanese Diplomacy:

The first is protecting freedom of thought, expression, and speech in this region...the second is ensuring that the seas, which are the most vital commons to us all, are governed by laws and rules, not by might...the third principle is pursuing free, open, interconnected economies as part of Japan's diplomacy...the fourth principle...is bringing about ever more fruitful intercultural ties among the peoples of Japan and this region...the fifth...is promoting exchange among the younger generations who will carry our nations into the future.<sup>185</sup>

Abe's five new principles were favorable to Obama's Asia-Pacific strategy. Through his doctrine, Abe stressed democratic norms and values. Expressing similarities with the Western community, Abe emphasized Japan's responsible role to region based on the rule of law.<sup>186</sup> On a bigger scale, Abe's five new principles shared content with Obama's principles of Asia-Pacific strategy. By pressuring China with ideological common values, both countries' principles shared the burden of encouraging China to recognize its responsible role in the international community. In the G7 summit in Brussels in June 2014, countries declared their opposition to useless tensions in the East and South China Seas resulting from any unilateral attempt to assert maritime or territorial claims by criticizing China indirectly.<sup>187</sup> In the region, Abe also made efforts to share maritime interests based on international law with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) against the unilateral assertiveness of China around sea sovereignty.

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<sup>185</sup> Shinzo Abe, "The Bounty of the Open Seas: Five New Principles for Japanese Diplomacy," (speech, the press conference, 18 January 2013), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201301/18speech\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201301/18speech_e.html).

<sup>186</sup> Nilsson-Wright and Fujiwara, "Japan's Abe Administration: Steering a Course between Pragmatism and Extremism."

<sup>187</sup> Michael J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: Pursuing a Path Forward," *Comparative Connections* 16.2, (September 2014).

For the United States, Abe's proactive pacifism diplomacy, unlike with the DPJ government, reduced U.S. political burdens in the region. In his second administration, Abe's diplomacy reshaped external extension at the regional level by focusing on global common values, while in his first administration he had tried to resolve regional tensions by improving bilateral relations with China. Yoo argues that Abe's revisionist movement fit U.S. national interests: "The U.S. regards Japan as a buck-passing state that can stand off China so that she fully supports the normal militarized state of Japan while the U.S. put more efforts to other nations in the Asian Pacific area to secure forward deployable bases where she can project her power."<sup>188</sup> Abe's proactive pacifism fit in with developing Japan's capabilities as well as being sufficient to fulfill the United States' demand for primacy in the region.

Abe's security revision plan materialized due to the U.S.'s shifting strategy to Asia and its approval of Abe's proactive pacifism. This was confirmed by a delicate attitude change by the U.S. government. In April 2013, Secretary Kerry stated neutrally when he visited Tokyo: "US has no position on ultimate sovereignty, recognition of Japan's administrative control, addressing the issue through peaceful means, and opposing any unilateral or coercive action to change the status quo."<sup>189</sup> The next April, the United States changed its perspective toward the Senkaku Islands and leaned more to Japan. Obama confirmed a defense pledge to Japan based on the U.S.-Japan Defense Treaty by reassuring Japan in the joint press conference: "Our commitment to Japan's security is absolute and article five of the security treaty covers all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku Islands."<sup>190</sup> The U.S. security pledge around the Senkaku Islands was decisive to enable Abe to move forward. This is because the U.S. perspective strongly supported Abe's domestic approval in executing a more

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<sup>188</sup> Sang Beom Yoo, "The Contents and Implications of the U.S. Pivot to Asia-Pacific Policy: Focusing on the Possibility of Confrontation between U.S. and China, and the Role of Japan," *Journal of Korean-Japanese Military and Culture* 18, (2014): 103.

<sup>189</sup> Green, "US-Japan Relations: Back on Track."

<sup>190</sup> Justin McCurry, "Obama Says US Will Defend Japan in Island Dispute with China," *The Guardian*, 24 April 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/obama-in-japan-backs-status-quo-in-island-dispute-with-china>.

bold policy toward China.<sup>191</sup> Based on support for Japanese nationalism around the Senkaku issue and security pledge of the United States, Abe could specify a new security package.

The 2014 U.S.-Japan summit was a watershed event for Abe to develop his security vision. Through the summit, U.S.-Japan leaders accelerated the expansion of strategic cooperation in the region, especially specifying economic and security agendas. The two countries reaffirmed shared economic interests by treating TPP as a constructive economic program in the region, and they agreed to step forward to conclude TPP.<sup>192</sup> In particular, in the joint press conference on 24 April, the two leaders showed a more concrete strategic partnership in the security realm. Obama welcomed Abe's main defense agenda, the exercise of the right of collective self-defense, and Abe promised Japan's devotion to the Obama rebalancing strategy toward the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>193</sup> Through the summit, under the stronger U.S.-Japan alliance, Abe was able to add external motivation to his existing domestic support to propel the right of collective self-defense. On 1 July, Abe decided to proceed with the right of collective self-defense bill through the decision of the cabinet, and the United States supported Abe's decision. On 19 December, Minister for Foreign Affairs Kishida and Secretary of State Kerry announced the joint statement of the 2+2 U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) meeting:

The U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region and Japan's policy of 'Proactive Contribution to Peace,' based on the principle of international cooperation, both contribute to efforts by the Alliance to ensure a peaceful and prosperous Asia-Pacific region. Along these lines, the Government of the United States welcomes and supports efforts made by the Government

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<sup>191</sup> Mike J. Green, "US-Japan Relations: The Sushi Summit," *Comparative Connections* 16.1 (May 2014).

<sup>192</sup> "U.S.-Japan Joint Statement: The United States and Japan: Shaping the Future of the Asia-Pacific and Beyond," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 25 April 2014, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page24e\\_000045.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page24e_000045.html).

<sup>193</sup> "Joint Press Conference with President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan," The White House, 24 April 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/24/joint-press-conference-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan>.

of Japan in the security field, including the cabinet decision on July 1, 2014, for developing seamless security legislation.<sup>194</sup>

The Collective Self-Defense bill passed both Houses in September 2015. Although Abe's decision met domestic backlash, he was strong enough to overcome this backlash by spending his political capital. Internationally, China and another ally of the United States, South Korea, expressed concern about the Japanese security bill's influencing regional instability; U.S. support of Japan, however, was strong enough to help Japan withstand their concerns.

The United States and Japan were able to fulfill mutual national interests by making the U.S.-Japan alliance stronger in the region. The United States improved its declining military projection by means of Japan's participating in collective defense in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, the United States is looking forward to realizing economic benefits by establishing the TPP alongside Japan. Meanwhile, Abe reduced his territorial concerns about the Senkaku Islands by reaffirming the U.S.-Japan defense treaty. At the same time, Abe was able to expand opportunities for use of force, the right of collective self-defense, through the official support of the U.S. government. Japan came closer to shaping a new grand strategy, amendment of Article 9, by changing its security policy (which had lasted almost 70 years) fundamentally.

## **B. RISING CHINA**

Rising China has shaped Japanese people's hostile perceptions toward China; at the same time, Abe has improved his political strength by exploiting a narrative of rising China toward revision, creating plans for Japanese normalization trajectory. This section will examine the rise of China and its implications for Japan. I will explore how rising China may affect Japanese perceptions of hostility and Japan's domestic politics, especially Abe's normalization trajectory.

The 2006 Yasukuni issue caused high political tension between China and Japan. Although Koizumi had visited Yasukuni annually since he became prime minister in

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<sup>194</sup> "Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee," Japan Ministry of Defense, 19 December 2014, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/anpo/js20141219e.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/js20141219e.html).

2001, his visit on 15 August 2006 made the situation worse. As mentioned earlier, China and South Korea regard August 15 as an annual anniversary of national independence, and they are considerably sensitive when Japanese politicians visit Yasukuni, where some Class-A war criminals are buried. Therefore, the two countries perceived Koizumi's behavior as an insult. China protested Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni by requiring a meeting with the Japanese ambassador while the Chinese ambassador made a protest to the Japanese Foreign Minister.<sup>195</sup> China focused on Tokyo's future diplomatic response on this issue, especially the actions of the next Prime Minister Abe, because Koizumi's August 15 visit was the last official visit during his tenure.

Abe wanted to improve relations with China by diplomatic means. Even before the inauguration, Abe clearly expressed his desire to open a summit with China to resolve the issue.<sup>196</sup> On 8 October 2006, the Beijing summit between Abe and Hu Jintao, the Chinese president, was held. They agreed to promote cooperation in the economic and environmental realms through a "mutually beneficial strategic relationship."<sup>197</sup> Abe expressed his intention to enhance Sino-Japanese relations by making China the destination for his first overseas travel, and China also responded positively to Abe's future-oriented manner.<sup>198</sup> Through the summit, Abe and Hu agreed to examine ways to resolve the complex historical issue.<sup>199</sup> Abe made efforts to reduce tension between China and Japan.

Abe's keynote of diplomacy was to pursue increasing political, security, and economic ties with Northeast Asian countries during his first tenure. Within this big picture, Abe actively explored reciprocal relationships. In addition, historical issues did not help the U.S.-Japan alliance. U.S. political experts were cautious about the potential

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<sup>195</sup> James J. Przystup, "Japan-China Relations: Searching for a Summit," *Comparative Connections* 8.3 (October 2006).

<sup>196</sup> Przystup, "Japan-China Relations: Searching for a Summit."

<sup>197</sup> Gerald Curtis et al., *Getting the Triangle Straight: Managing China-Japan-U.S. Relations* (Tokyo; New York, NY: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2010), 261.

<sup>198</sup> James, J. Przystup, "Japan-China Relations: Ice Breaks at the Summit," *Comparative Connections* 8.4 (January 2007).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

for Japanese historical issues to cause instability in the region. Furthermore, Chinese leadership kept pursuing moderate foreign policy with neighbors to continue to achieve its peaceful development. President Hu also supported seeking common ground for restoring the relationship with Japan. Japan's Asian-friendly diplomacy continued after Abe's first administration.

## **1. Rising China**

By 2010, China had become the second largest country in the global economy and this economic rise increased Japan's economic dependence on China. Since Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) pragmatic adoption of a free market system in 1979, China had continued to achieve economic development. As shown in Figure 8, China averaged almost 10 percent real annual GDP growth during those periods.<sup>200</sup> Global investors regarded the growing Chinese market as a new engine to support sustained economic development. The opportunities provided by China's economic growth also affected bilateral economic relations between China and Japan. China is one of the most significant economic partners for Japan, due to Japan's economic decline since the 1990s.<sup>201</sup> Increasing economic dependence on China, however, means that Japan could suffer relative economic vulnerability. If this relative economic disparity grows and diplomatic conflicts expand between the two countries, negative mutual relations could damage the Japanese economy.

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<sup>200</sup> Wayne M. Morrison, *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States* (CRS Report No. RL33534) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 5, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf>.

<sup>201</sup> Robert G. Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy since the Cold War*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 184.

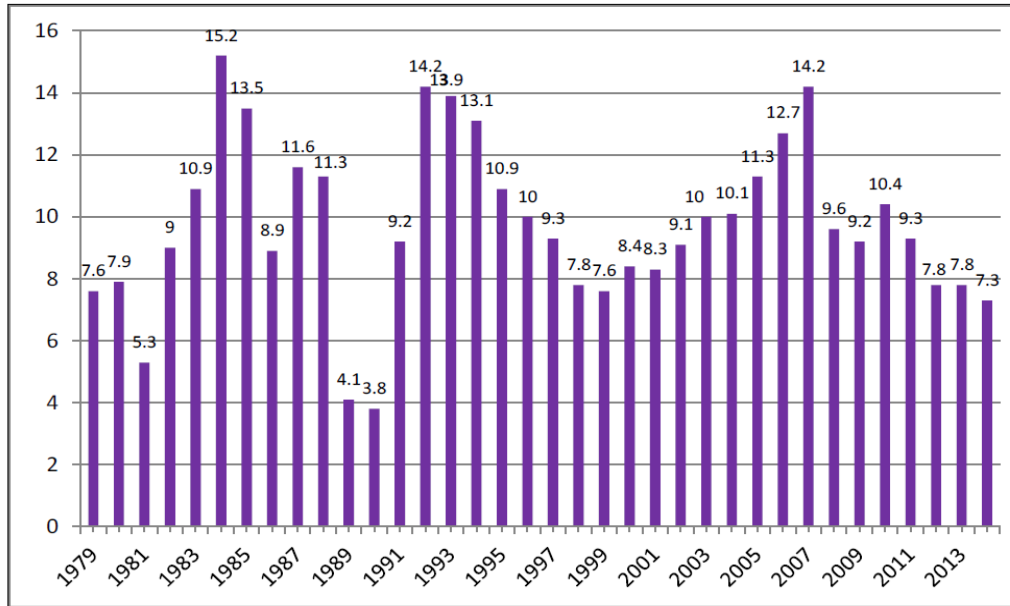


Figure 8. Chinese Real GDP Growth: 1979–2014<sup>202</sup>

Over the last two decades, China's military has modernized rapidly amid economic development. Since the middle of the 1990s, China has continuously increased its military budget and improved its defense capabilities. This growth is more conspicuous when Chinese military expenditures are compared to Japan's. As shown in Figure 9, China's military expenditure (52179 billion) exceeded Japan's military expenditure (47156 billion) in 2001 for the first time in history, while Japan (45896 billion) was higher than China (27837 billion) in military expenditure in 1996.<sup>203</sup> In 2015, China's military budget was almost five times (214787 billion) more than that of Japan (40885 billion).<sup>204</sup> China became the second largest country in the world in terms of its military budget, following the United States.

<sup>202</sup> Source from Morrison, *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States*.

<sup>203</sup> Military Expenditure Database, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

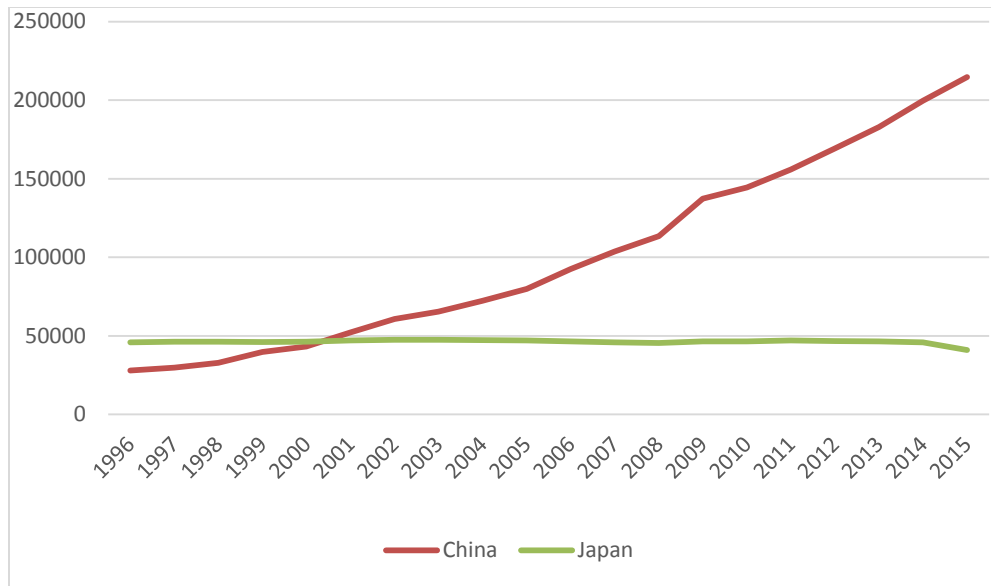


Figure 9. Military Expenditure 1996–2015: China and Japan  
(2015, U.S.\$ Billions)<sup>205</sup>

On the basis of those aggressive military expenditures, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) continues to develop its military capabilities. These include nuclear strike capabilities; the collective Chinese defense capability known as Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD); Information Operations; Cyber Operations; Long-Range Precision Strike; Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD); Surface and Undersea Operations; Space and Counter-space; Integrated Air and Missile Defense; and Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence (C4I) modernization.<sup>206</sup> Chinese leadership seems to base its decisions on the belief that a strong military plays a significant role in ensuring core national interests.<sup>207</sup> This rapid military buildup has caused security concern on the part of the countries of the northeast Asia region, especially Japan, and the United States as

<sup>205</sup> Military Expenditure Database, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

<sup>206</sup> “Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2015,” Department of Defense, 7 April 2015, [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015\\_China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015_China_Military_Power_Report.pdf).

<sup>207</sup> “Annual Report to Congress,” Department of Defense.



well.<sup>208</sup> China's rapid military modernization program is likely to cause increasing regional tension.

## **2. The Advent of Xi and His Assertive Foreign Policy**

Adding to the recent trends of China's economic and military rise, the advent of Xi Jinping, a new leader of China from 2012, has expanded China's role in the region. Zhang argued that President Xi tries to play a more proactive role in international affairs even as China pursues its national goal of peaceful development.<sup>209</sup> Xi's foreign policy is considerably distinguished from that of the former leadership.<sup>210</sup> One of the most significant features of Xi's foreign policy is its official emphasis on China's intention to strongly pursue its interests in the international arena. It is natural for a state to pursue its national interests in foreign affairs; this is a strikingly different approach from the former CCP leadership, however.<sup>211</sup> For example, Xi suggested a new type of major country relationship in Sino-U.S. relations at a meeting with President Obama in June 2013.<sup>212</sup> Xi's proposal seemed to run counter to the "responsible stakeholder" idea suggested by U.S. initiatives in 2005. In turn, China requested that the U.S. contribute to more constructive efforts in the Asia-Pacific region. In other words, China made clear that it would not sacrifice its own interests in the region. In this manner, a basic theme of Chinese foreign policy under Xi can be summarized as the pursuit of peaceful development and a protection of core national interests.

Under Xi's assertive foreign policy, Sino-Japanese bilateral relations have become more competitive and challenging. For instance, territorial disputes around the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands always have potential to escalate to a high level of direct crisis between the two countries. Each country strongly claims the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands as

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<sup>208</sup> Nina Hachigian, ed., *Debating China: The U.S.-China Relationship in Ten Conversations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 153–160.

<sup>209</sup> Jian Zhang, "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0'?" *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27.1 (2015): 14, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14781158.2015.993958>.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

its own territory. When the 2012 Senkaku crisis occurred, Sino-Japanese relations fell into their worst condition since the end of the Second World War. This crisis also touched on sovereignty in the East and South China Seas. China unilaterally declared an Airspace Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea, and also intensified territorial disputes and competition over resources around the South China Sea. These maritime security disputes became a direct source of Sino-Japanese rivalry.<sup>213</sup>

China's rising also indirectly contributes to Japanese internal perceptions of China as a threat with severe regional security concerns. During the 20th century, Japan held a dominant position over China, militarily and economically. In the 21st century, however, the situation turned in China's favor. China surpassed Japan in economic power in 2010. While Japan could use its economic leverage over China in the past, the current economic power balance enables China to use its economic leverage to damage Japanese interests.<sup>214</sup> As stated above, China is going along its military modernization rapidly, having five times more budget than Japan. Regardless of China's intentions, a fear of Japan is China's rise toward hegemony status.<sup>215</sup> This suspicion may lead Japan to try to impede this rise.

The 2012 Senkaku crisis created the most serious damage to the bilateral relations between Japan and China. The Japanese government's purchase of the Senkaku Islands from their private Japanese owner on 11 September 2012 was fundamentally changed the relationship between China and Japan. In history, both countries had agreed to avoid the Senkaku dispute for diplomatic win-win Cooperation under the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship.<sup>216</sup> The issue, however, has become a major conflict between the two countries since a 2010 boat collision incident between a Chinese trawler and patrol

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<sup>213</sup> Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations*, 176.

<sup>214</sup> Sheila A. Smith, *Intimate Rivals: Japanese Domestic Politics and a Rising China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 239–40.

<sup>215</sup> Kenneth B. Pyle, *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 335.

<sup>216</sup> Jiangyong Liu, "China's Japan Policy and its Domestic Background," in Takashi Inoguchi and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *The Troubled Triangle: Economic and Security Concerns for the United States, Japan, and China* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 161–2.  
[http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9781137316851\\_8#page-1](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9781137316851_8#page-1).

boats of the Japanese Coast Guard near the Senkakus. Ishihara Shintaro, Tokyo Governor and long-time conservative politician, initiated purchasing the Senkakus to protect national territory.<sup>217</sup> Once the Japanese government accepted this policy, the Senkaku crisis came to test China's diplomacy regarding Japan as a strategic partner.

Unlike in his first administration, Abe presented a hard political stance toward China from the beginning of his term in office. Abe pointed to the weakness of the DPJ by saying, "The blatant entry of Chinese ships into Japanese waters was the result of 'the diplomatic failure of the DPJ.'"<sup>218</sup> Even after the election, Abe firmly regarded the Senkaku Islands as the inherent territory of Japan by stating that "there is no room for negotiations about that."<sup>219</sup> Abe decided on balancing toward China. No bilateral meetings with China for the first 23 months of his second term in office meant that his hard stance toward China and poor relationship with rising China was continuing.

Abe's change in diplomatic attitude was responsible for a different dimension of the conflict from the 2006 Yasukuni dispute. The Senkakus issue is a sovereignty dispute over the maritime area around the East China Sea.<sup>220</sup> A sovereignty issue resulting from territorial conflict is a zero-sum game, while historical conflict is based on ideological disputes. Whether governed by the DPJ or the LDP, the Japanese government applied a no-compromise policy on the Senkaku dispute. Thus, characteristics of the 2012 Senkaku crisis were fundamentally different from the 2006 Yasukuni dispute. Also, unlike the 2006 Yasukuni crisis, the Senkaku issue geopolitically connected to the strategic interests of the U.S.-Japan alliance in the region. Concerted actions of the alliance and the cooperation with other Asian countries are essential to keep their maritime sovereignty around the East and South China Seas as well. Furthermore, considering trends of Xi's diplomacy, it is doubtful that Japan will look forward to cooperating with China. Considering Chinese history, China will pursue its assertive policy more likely because

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<sup>217</sup> James J. Przystup, "Japan-China Relations: 40th Anniversary: Fuggetaboutit!" *Comparative Connections* 14.3 (January 2013).

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

China was considerably sensitive to the sovereignty matter. Consequently, the Senkaku crisis deepened a confrontation between the Sino-Japanese relations. The crisis greatly encouraged people to form a negative image of each other and decision makers to exploit domestic demands.

### **3. Senkaku Nationalism**

The combination of historical and sovereignty disputes around the Senkaku Islands made the Japanese perceive China as a threat. This perception developed into Senkaku nationalism, aligning the Japanese government with the public. This form of relationship reveals how rising China has impacted Japanese domestic politics. Changes of security strategy such as collective self-defense have been mostly influenced by the concerns of Japan and its allies toward rising China, making the region unstable.

As China has rapidly modernized its military, Japan has continued to perceive China as a substantial threat. According to a survey conducted by Yomiuri Shimbun and Gallup, 78 percent of Japanese perceived China as a military threat.<sup>221</sup> The main reason are as follows: (1) Chinese vessels' encroachment on Japanese territorial water near the Senkaku Islands and (2) Chinese attempts to mine undersea resources around the Senkaku Islands.<sup>222</sup>

Under the second Abe administration, the perception of China as a threat has gradually increased. Public opinion toward China grew worse. For example, according to a survey conducted by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* in 2006, 44 percent of the Japanese people regarded China as a threat.<sup>223</sup> Anti-China sentiment rapidly increased after the Senkaku dispute, however. On 12 August 2013, Xinhua revealed that 92.8 percent of Japanese had a negative image toward China.<sup>224</sup> The multiple crises around the Senkaku Islands have changed decision makers' perception toward China as well. The decision makers of the

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<sup>221</sup> Green, "US-Japan Relations: Big Steps, Big Surprises."

<sup>222</sup> "11th Japan-China Joint Opinion Poll Analysis Report on the Comparative Data," *The Genron NPO*, 22 October 2015, [http://www.genron-npo.net/pdf/2015forum\\_en.pdf](http://www.genron-npo.net/pdf/2015forum_en.pdf).

<sup>223</sup> Przystup, "Japan-China Relations: Searching for a Summit."

<sup>224</sup> James J. Przystup, "Japan-China Relations: Going Nowhere Slowly," *Comparative Connections* 15.2 (September 2013).

Japanese government regarded rising China as their major security concern in the long run.<sup>225</sup> China's rising power and assertive foreign policy against Japan developed China into a regional rival regardless of the Japanese government and the public.<sup>226</sup>

Expanded anti-Chinese sentiment resulting from this threat perception, especially related to the territorial sovereignty around the Senkaku Islands, deeply connected to Japanese nationalism. During Abe's second tenure, the Japanese people have shown a passive attitude toward adopting Abe's security agenda; the majority of the public widely supported the cabinet's resolute actions in dealing with Senkaku conflicts with China without larger aversions, however. These Japanese sentiments originated from Japan's "effective control" of Senkaku and can be called Senkaku nationalism.<sup>227</sup> A concept of effective control is not assertive but an adequate slogan; thus, this idea is valid enough to appeal to the public because the principle is based on international law.<sup>228</sup> A multi-generational coalition could rally around the Senkaku nationalism.<sup>229</sup>

Abe has politically exploited the Senkaku nationalism to use for his own political ambition. The public has put political pressure on the cabinet to maintain a hard stance toward China around the Senkaku issue. Growing Japanese skepticism of China made it hard for the cabinet to compromise with China and created political opportunism for politicians.<sup>230</sup> As the public's demand for a hard line to the Senkaku issue increased, China discourse became a punching bag in Japanese electoral campaigns.<sup>231</sup> Abe used benefits of the Senkaku nationalism in the elections. When tension between China and Japan around Senkaku was high in 2012, Abe was back in office and regained power by emphasizing no compromise over territorial sovereignty with China during the election campaign.

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<sup>225</sup> Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations*, 177.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Sheila A. Smith, *Intimate Rivals*, 241.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

Senkaku nationalism has also influenced Abe's proactive pacifism policy. Abe continuously sought to convince the public of the necessity of a new grand strategy. He would fundamentally change the security strategy that had been maintained from the time of the Yoshida Doctrine. The Yoshida Doctrine, in place since the Second World War, was a grand strategy of Japan as a commercial state to achieve great economic power under the security umbrella of the United States.<sup>232</sup> Although the Yoshida Doctrine had achieved high growth and economic capability, it is not a normal strategy in Abe's eyes. Abe cannot remain satisfied with Japan's economic reputation alone, because Japan had a shocking experience in its economic aid to Iraq war.<sup>233</sup> Despite providing large scale war expenditures, Japan gained little economic devotion from Kuwait.<sup>234</sup> Abe's vision is to return to being a normal state that is able to use its armed forces. This is because Japan would not only protect its territory, such as the Senkaku Islands, but also improve its national reputation by contributing military support to the world, which it cannot do unless it possesses a strong military capability. Senkaku nationalism would be helpful to strengthen this philosophy, and Abe also kept promoting Senkaku nationalism to the public in order to pass the collective self-defense bill. Therefore, Senkaku nationalism would continue to support a narrative of amendment of Article 9 and normalization trajectory, unless the Senkaku conflict could be resolved to a certain extent between China and Japan.

## **C. THE KOREAN PENINSULA**

### **1. North Korea**

Provocations of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) have continued during both of Abe's tenures and gradually increased regional instability in Northeast Asia. The advent of new leader Kim Jong-un, successor to his father Kim Jong-il, brought additional political uncertainty to the region. Also, North Korea's advanced nuclear technology, including five nuclear tests, nuclear miniaturizing efforts and long

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<sup>232</sup> Samuels, *Securing Japan*.

<sup>233</sup> Estevez-Abe, "Feeling Triumphant in Tokyo," *Foreign Affairs* (May 2014), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/138252>.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

range missile capability, directly heightened security concerns in Japan. These North Korean military capabilities and missile tests have rapidly threatened the area of Japan's sovereignty. As a result, these security concerns became one of the factors for the Abe administration to cite for political justification to gradually increase its defense capability.

Japan is no longer surprised by North Korea's provocations. Since North Korea's nuclear program was unveiled to the world in the 1990s, five nuclear tests and numerous missile launches have occurred, as detailed in Figure 10. In particular, for Japan, it was a shock when North Korea's Taepodong missile was launched over Japanese airspace in August 1998.<sup>235</sup> This direct security menace was almost the first such experience from North Korea, although Japan already regarded North Korea as a suspicious state. The sinking of a DPRK "secret vessel" by Japanese forces was also known as "the first incident of Japanese hostile fire" during its post-war history.<sup>236</sup> Japanese hostile sentiment was at its peak when past Japanese abductions by North Korean agents were revealed to the public. North Korea officially admitted the abductions, and Kim Jong-il apologized but confirmed this issue in 2002 Japan-DPRK bilateral talks. As a result, an enraged Japanese public frustrated the negotiation of normalization of diplomatic relations, one of the agenda items of the bilateral talks.

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<sup>235</sup> Samuels, *Securing Japan*, 150.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 148

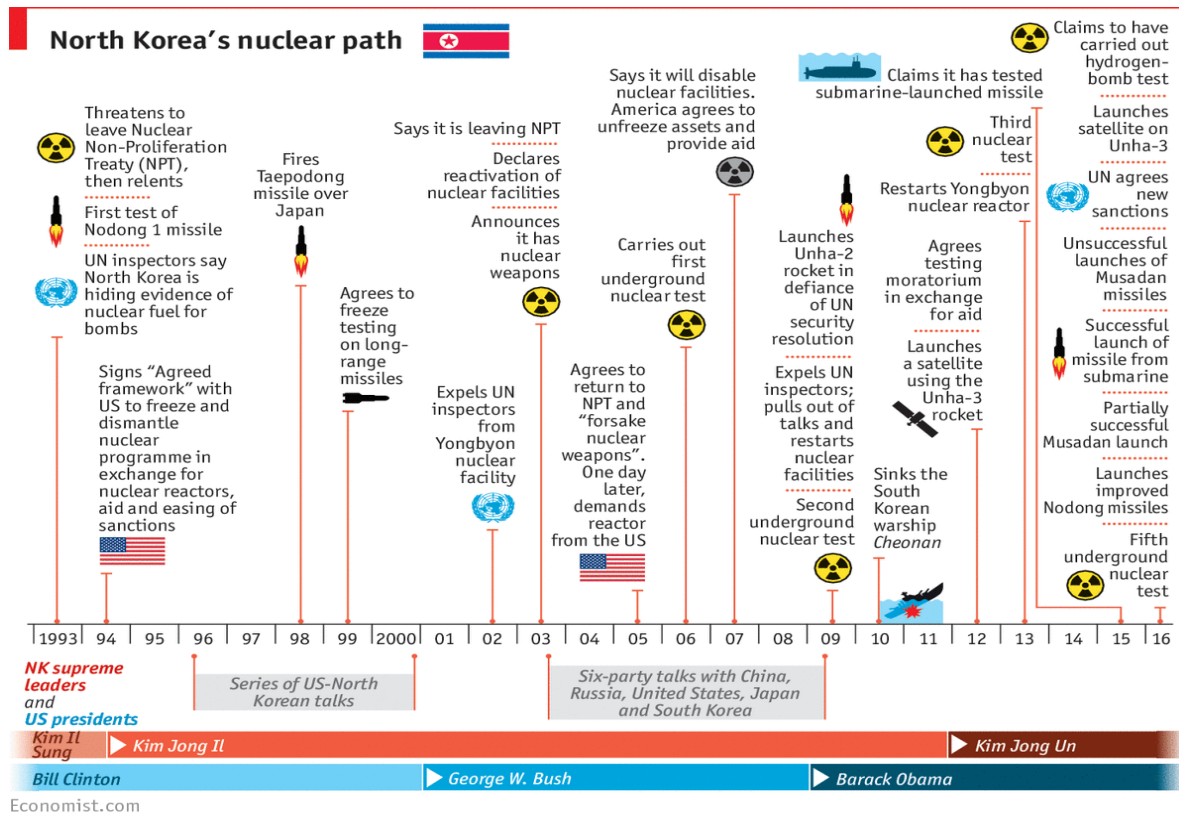


Figure 10. A Timeline of North Korea's Nuclear Tests and Missile Launches<sup>237</sup>

Abe has been one of the beneficiaries of anti-North Korea sentiment. As a head of government to lead the negotiations with North Korea, Abe took a hard stance on the abduction issue. Abe strongly recommended to the cabinet that the five abductees should remain in Japan even after their temporary visit to Japan from North Korea to visit their families.<sup>238</sup> This decision brought about national support by the Japanese regarding North Korea as a threat because North Korea took the abductees' families in North Korea as hostages.<sup>239</sup> As prime minister since 2006, Abe tried to take advantage of the abduction issue to achieve his political objectives, such as constitutional revision discussion and

<sup>237</sup> Source from "A Timeline of North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions," *The Economist*, 9 September 2016, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/09/troubling-trajectory>.

<sup>238</sup> Abe, *Utsukushii kuni e [Toward a Beautiful Country]*, 47–8.

<sup>239</sup> Samuels, *Securing Japan*, 149.



Basic Education Law revision.<sup>240</sup> Sentiment toward North Korea worsened when North Korea went ahead with its first nuclear test on 9 October 2006. North Korea's military provocation became Japan's primary security concern, lowering China to second place.<sup>241</sup> At the same time, sentiment against North Korea constrained policy makers' diplomatic choices. After the nuclear test, policy makers had to seriously reexamine missile defense with the United States.<sup>242</sup> Even some Japanese politicians began to think about Japan possessing its own nuclear option.<sup>243</sup> Obviously, the military provocation of North Korea provided Abe with sufficient obligation to strengthen the Japanese defense capabilities.

The rise of new North Korean leader Kim Jong-un created unpredictable political variables in regional security. When Kim Jong-il died in 2011, many people were concerned with the future of North Korea. Kim Jong-un did not have enough time to prepare as the regime successor and was too young to be equipped with diverse political experiences or the wisdom of age. Through the Yeonpyeong Island Shelling incident on 23 November 2010, however, Kim seemed successful in using his solid political charisma to consolidate his power. After the shelling, South Koreans were in panic because direct land attack upon the home of general civilians was a new type of military provocation in the post-Korean War era. According to Ken Gause, this provocation led by Kim was actually his debut as a successor in the regime: "it was an exercise in internal communications to the regime, highlighting the heir apparent as a 'military genius'...Kim Jong-un's first public appearance following the Third Party Conference seemed designed

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<sup>240</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, "Abduction Issue Used by Japanese Nationalists," 17 December 2006, *International Herald Tribune*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/17/world/asia/17iht-japan.3928633.html>.

<sup>241</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, "'Super-Sizing' The DPRK Threat: Japan's Evolving Military Posture and North Korea," *Asian Survey* 49.2 (2009): 291, [http://www.waseda.jp/gsaps/eai/educational\\_program/PDF%20SS2015/Reading/Lecture4\\_Reading2.pdf](http://www.waseda.jp/gsaps/eai/educational_program/PDF%20SS2015/Reading/Lecture4_Reading2.pdf); Defense of Japan 2006, (Annual White Paper), [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2006.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2006.html).

<sup>242</sup> Sheryl Wudunn, "North Korea Fires Missile Over Japanese Territory," *The New York Times*, 1 September 1988, [http://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/01/world/north-korea-fires-missile-over-japanese-territory.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/01/world/north-korea-fires-missile-over-japanese-territory.html?_r=1).

<sup>243</sup> Hughes, "'Super-Sizing' The DPRK Threat," 292.

to link him publicly to military operations, especially the artillery command.”<sup>244</sup> In December 2013, Kim surprised the world again by purging his uncle, Jang Sung-taek. Jang was known as the vice-chairman of the National Defense Commission and a “key policy adviser” to Kim.<sup>245</sup> Since this unexpected political event, Kim has brutally purged more officials regardless of political reputation or background. By purging existing power holders, he has seemed to consolidate his absolute power within the regime.

Due to Kim’s unpredictable personality, the uncertainty of Japan’s security has gradually increased. As illustrated by Figure 10 above, Kim implemented rapidly increased nuclear and missile tests in a relatively short term, compared to his father Kim Jong-il. On 12 February 2013, Kim conducted the third nuclear test, and he conducted two more in 2016. In spite of tough sanctions from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) after the fourth nuclear test in January 2016, Kim declared the DPRK to be a “nuclear state” at the Korea Worker’s Party (KWP) Central Committee in May.<sup>246</sup> Furthermore, in August, a missile launched by North Korea fell in Japan’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ).<sup>247</sup> Recently, North Korea showed bolder behavior by conducting the fifth nuclear test on 9 September. Kim Jung-un has seemed to show political confidence since the successful fifth nuclear test, notifying the world that the DPRK has valid nuclear weapon capabilities and diverse means to launch them. North Korea is closer to real nuclear power after the fifth nuclear test, even though many countries still officially denying this.

Reacting to these military threats, Abe was able to politically justify a revised security strategy. Soon after Abe’s inauguration in his second tenure, North Korea’s nuclear test in early 2013 became a turning point to execute underground work for

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<sup>244</sup> Ken E. Gause, “North Korea’s Provocation and Escalation Calculus: Dealing with the Kim Jong-un Regime,” *Center for Naval Analyses* (2015): 14, [https://www.cna.org/cna\\_files/pdf/COP-2015-U-011060.pdf](https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/COP-2015-U-011060.pdf).

<sup>245</sup> Sang-hun Choe, “N. Korea Reshuffle Seen as Part of Succession Plan,” *New York Times*, 7 June 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/08/world/asia/08korea.html?emc=eta1&r=0>.

<sup>246</sup> Defense of Japan 2016 (Annual White Paper), 19, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2016.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2016.html).

<sup>247</sup> “Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Comment on the Launch of Missile by North Korea,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 3 August 2016, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/decisions/2016/1218575\\_11024.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/decisions/2016/1218575_11024.html).

strengthening the security institution of his cabinet. On 4 December, Abe launched the National Security Council (NSC) mainly for promoting better security coordination between bureaucrats and communication with the United States.<sup>248</sup> Abe also published the National Security Strategy (NSS) to specify his security contents. As a part of this institutional achievement, the cabinet approved replacement of the old Three Principles on Arms Exports and Their Related Policy Guidelines with a new Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology on 1 April 2014.<sup>249</sup> The new principles allowed the Japanese to sell/transfer their defense equipment and technology abroad. This new posture was a fundamental change of defense policy maintained since post-WWII because the former principles banned defense munitions exports. The new principles mainly originated in response to China's military rise and North Korea's advanced nuclear and missile capability.<sup>250</sup> In the same manner, the North Korean nuclear crisis was largely responsible for the 2015 new security bills. Abe's strong security drive is not irrelevant, given the regional uncertainty provided by the Kim regime. Christopher Hughes argued that the successive provocations of North Korea have accelerated the Japanese normalization discourse.<sup>251</sup> The combination of real armed power and Kim Jong-un's disordered characteristics have led the Japanese people to recognize him as an urgent existing threat, providing the Abe cabinet with corresponding justification. Thus, North Korea's provocation can be seen as a political gift to Japanese conservatives who want to change the JSDF into a normal military.

## **2. South Korea**

For Japan, trilateral relations with the U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) are essential to maintain regional stability. Historical disputes, however, were a major obstacle to the bilateral relation between Japan and South Korea and, therefore, also a

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<sup>248</sup> Green, "US-Japan Relation: Big Step, Big Surprises."

<sup>249</sup> "The Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we\\_000083.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000083.html).

<sup>250</sup> Taisuke Hirose, "Japan's New Arms Export Principles: Strengthening U.S.-Japan Relations," CSIS Newsletter, 14 October 2014, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/japan%E2%80%99s-new-arms-export-principles-strengthening-us-japan-relations>.

<sup>251</sup> Hughes, "'Super-Sizing' The DPRK Threat," 291.

negative factor for U.S.-Japan alliance. Unlike in his first tenure, Abe adopted pragmatic diplomacy with South Korea and achieved a notable result, the “comfort women agreement.” The agreement has helped Abe to improve his uncompromising image both at home and abroad. Furthermore, Abe opened the door for better cooperation with South Korea, and for better trilateral relations as well. In this section, the comfort women agreement is the focus. I will briefly examine its implications for the second Abe administration.

In his first administration, Abe’s aggressive historical revision faced domestic backlash as well as strong anti-Japan sentiment from South Korea. Japan and South Korea have shared strong values including democracy, a market system, and parallel alliances with the United States; their relationships are complicated, however. That is mostly because historical grievances resulting from Japan’s occupation of the Korean Peninsula are not settled. The comfort women issue became a symbol accelerating diplomatic conflicts caused by identity clashes between Japan and South Korea. Most Korean mass media were negative toward Abe’s historical perceptions.

For a time, Abe’s historical view continued into his second tenure, worsening relations with South Korea. Abe ordered a review of the 1993 Kono statement, which accepted that the Japanese Imperial Army had forced Asian women into “sexual slavery” during WWII.<sup>252</sup> Abe also undermined South Korean expectations by not showing further reconciliation in his speech at the Seventieth National Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead.<sup>253</sup> As a result, only on 2 November 2015, for the first time, were bilateral formal talks held between Park and Abe. This step had taken three years and five months since the trilateral talks among South Korea-China-Japan.

Abe has changed his existing attitude, however, pursuing settlement of the comfort women issue. Surprisingly, on 29 December 2015, South Korea and Japan reached an agreement on this issue. The Japanese government officially admitted “an

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<sup>252</sup> Sarah Kim, “50 Years after Korea-Japan Pact, Some Issues Won’t Go Away,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, 23 June 2015, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3005725>.

<sup>253</sup> Shinzo Abe, “Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Seventieth National Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead,” (speech, the press conference, 15 August 2015), [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96\\_abe/statement/201301/18speech\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201301/18speech_e.html).

involvement of the Japanese military authorities” with comfort women.<sup>254</sup> Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said that “Prime Minister Abe expresses anew his most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women” and, to create a fund for these damages, the Japanese government pledged 1 billion yen (\$8.3 million).<sup>255</sup> In response, South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se stated that Seoul would consider the issue “irreversibly” resolved.<sup>256</sup> This sudden agreement was a surprise to both countries’ people and the world as well.

The United States’ commitment to this issue was an important factor in reaching the agreement, and Japan and South Korea seemed to synchronize a pragmatic way to cooperate at a higher level on mutual regional interests. The U.S. government has put pressure on Japan and South Korea to settle historical grievances peacefully. From the United States’ perspective, the trilateral relationship is one of the most significant elements in securing political stability in Northeast Asia under the Obama Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy. Abe also attempted to reduce political friction with the United States by settling this historical matter. Through the comfort women agreement, Japan and South Korea responded to a strategic demand of the United States. Victor Cha argues that sharing an alliance with the United States has a strong convergence effect on the Japan-ROK relations, according to his ROK-Japan quasi-alliance theory.<sup>257</sup> Japan and South Korea grasped an opportunity to stress the forward-looking trilateral U.S.-Japan-ROK partnership for the Asia region

The comfort women agreement is meaningful for the Abe cabinet in several ways. Japan took a major step to settle one of the most complex historic issues between Japan

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<sup>254</sup> “Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 28 December 2015, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/na/kr/page4e\\_000364.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kr/page4e_000364.html).

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.; Holly Yan, KJ Kwon, Junko Ogura, and Tiffany, “South Korea, Japan Reach Agreement on ‘Comfort Women’,” *CNN*, 25 February 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/28/asia/south-korea-japan-comfort-women/>.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Brad Glosserman and Scott A. Snyder, “Convergence and Alienation in Japan-South Korea Relations,” in *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 94.

and South Korea. The comfort women issue, including other historic disputes, had prevented enhancing the relationships between the two states over two decades. By settling the comfort women issue, Japan and South Korea gained momentum to develop a new relationship.

The agreement will be also helpful to Japan's normalization trajectories. Internationally, many countries, even its ally the United States, worried about Japan's being revisionist. The Japanese, however, showed that they were able to solve conflicts among countries peacefully. In addition, this behavior will increase Japan's international reputation and support its effort to be one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council in the long run.

The agreement gave Abe an opportunity to pave the way for a positive political image. Some people were concerned that a rapid shift to the right by Abe would not take Japan's neighbors, China and South Korea, into consideration. Even though Abe had a strong revisionist image, through the comfort women agreement, he proved that he also has a political mind and the capability to reduce tensions for regional stability. This agreement allowed Abe to take advantage of opportunities to persuade those who may otherwise oppose him. Abe was able to gain trust from the public to pursue his further domestic and foreign policies.

Lastly, the settlement allows Japan to frame further disputes around the comfort women issue as a Korean domestic issue. The official statement of the agreement said that this issue was resolved "finally and irreversibly."<sup>258</sup> Japan can claim they are no longer responsible for Korean dissatisfaction on the premise that Japan fulfilled their duties as specified by the agreement faithfully. At least, Abe was able to escape from the criticism that Japan is the only problematic actor on the comfort women dispute.

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<sup>258</sup> "Announcement by Foreign Ministers of Japan and the Republic of Korea at the Joint Press Occasion," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis focused on the differences between Japanese Prime Minister Abe's two premierships and on how he transformed his second tenure into a success. As he depicts himself, Abe is the main revisionist within the Japanese normalization movement. Abe led the cabinet during two non-consecutive tenures; the outcomes of his two cabinets were different, however. While his first administration from 2006 to 2007 ended relatively quickly due to the sudden drop of approval ratings in his cabinet, Abe's second administration from 2012 has been successful in ensuring political stability and maintaining its approval in several elections. In the security domain, especially, unlike his first tenure, Abe has also succeeded in his second tenure in expanding the level of permissible use of force from only the self-defense level, as maintained since the end of the WWII, to the level of collective self-defense with Japan's allies. Since there has been little academic research on this topic, the huge gap between the political outcomes of Abe's two tenures was the main motivation to pursue this study, with the following questions in mind: (1) what factors have differentiated these outcomes? (2) what has produced Abe's relative success in his second administration?

To answer this question, this thesis compared the two Abe administrations, focusing particularly on agenda setting, economic policy, election tactics, and security policy. One of the most distinguishing features between the administrations was Abe's political agenda. In his first tenure, Abe primarily focused on ideological issues by introducing his political philosophy, "beautiful country." Abe developed the beautiful country discourse through diverse domestic policies, including patriotic textbook reform, Fundamental Law of Education revision, and the amendment of Article 9. This focus had the ultimate goal of amending Article 9. Meanwhile, in Abe's second administration, Abenomics was a top priority of his cabinet, promoting economic policy. Abenomics created significant political momentum for Abe in his second administration. First, Abenomics fit the primary concern of the majority of the Japanese people. Second, its initial economic outcomes increased the people's positive expectations for economic revitalization and escaping from long-lasting economic stagnation. Third, and most

important, Abe was able to recover his political image from his political failure in the last tenure. These two different agendas created different electoral outcomes. While political scandals disrupted his first tenure, the main reason for the public's rejection was unfamiliarity with his ideological agenda. As a result, Abe lost the 2007 Upper House election. In contrast, during his second tenure, the initial success of Abenomics let Abe create initial political stability by securing a majority of both houses. Abe's election tactics were also significant in strengthening his premiership. Abe's call for a snap election in 2014 enabled his cabinet to gain a political foothold and establish long-term stability. Victory in the snap election was based on Abe's elaborate political calculus to overcome an Abenomics crisis prompted by a consumption tax rise. By focusing his election campaign thoroughly on the economic agenda, Abe accumulated political capital. Victories in all elections during his second tenure created a conducive environment for developing Abe's security policy. Unlike in his first tenure, Abe achieved his security policy objectives step-by-step by spending his political capital. From establishing the NSC to passing the collective self-defense bills, Abe was successful in the security domain as well.

At the individual level, unlike his first administration, Abe's pragmatism in statecraft was crucial for political success in his second administration. Abe adopted a pragmatic approach to accomplish his political objectives, in contrast to the uncompromising political stance through which he failed to promote his policy in his first administration. When Abe returned in 2012, his first motivation was taking political power back from the DPJ. Abe demonstrated his pragmatism by aligning his top-priority agenda to economic issues, the primary concern of the voters. Unlike in his first administration, Abe separated his security agenda from the election campaign. In addition, in every election, Abe picked up new economic slogans and revealed new economic pledges right before the elections. Abe actively used public polls in his policy and election strategy as well. For instance, he reversed his pledge to postpone the sales tax rise in the 2016 Upper House election. Abe was politically influenced by prevailing negative opinion toward the tax rise issue and, at the same time, exploited high support of



the public by skillfully planning President Obama's historic visit to Hiroshima before the election.

Abe's pragmatism continued even after he gained control of both houses and even as he applied himself to the security domain. Through a step-by-step approach in the security area, Abe avoided the failures of his first tenure. He used his prerogative as a prime minister to change the agenda when he chose to. When he was confident in his public approval, Abe changed his agenda from economy to security and promoted a deepened security policy. Conversely, when he seemed relatively weak – for example after passing the collective self-defense bill – Abe tried to switch the agenda to economic issues such as TPP and the 100 Million Japanese Citizens' Active Roles policy. Abe's flexible policy choice under favorable or non-favorable political conditions enabled him to minimize his political damage. Abe's pragmatic strategy proved one of his success mechanisms in his second administration, emphasizing a correlation between managing political indicators and his policy execution.

Abe's pragmatism originated in his own political experiences – both his failures and his successes. Political failure during Abe's first administration became an asset in managing domestic affairs in his second administration. Comparing both his tenures shows that Abe has learned a lesson on the politics of compromise. For Abe, escaping from uncompromising ideological discourse and embracing a pragmatic position was helpful to shape political stability in his second administration. Upon gaining a majority in both Houses through his pragmatic approach, Abe was able to concentrate on enhancing the security environment in his preferred direction.

At the domestic level, multiple factors influenced Abe's political success. Former administrations politically influenced each Abe administration that followed. During his first tenure, Abe was overconfident due to the high popularity that he inherited from former Prime Minister Koizumi. As a result, he excessively exhausted political capital in the reform security agenda. In the process of taking power back from the DPJ, however, Abe thoroughly emphasized economic revival to appeal to the public; this approach brought about political stability. So far, this formula has not failed him in elections.

Unlike in his first tenure, Abe has also maintained political dominance within the LDP. In the 2015 LDP presidential election, no candidates competed with Abe. The main reason for his dominance was the political capital he accumulated. Abe's influence within his party seems absolute. Recent movements to amend party rules expanding the maximum term of the party president further suggests Abe's dominance within his party. Abe's strong leadership seems likely to extend his presidency of his party and to allow him to serve as the premier as well until 2021.

Another factor in Abe's domestic success is the weakness of the opposition parties. Most importantly, the DPJ lost its ability to politically check and balance Abe. The DPJ's lack of popularity was reflected in its political image of incompetency during its ruling period from 2009 to 2012. DPJ's image was fueled by its lack of experience in governing, its lack of policy coordination with bureaucrats and its ally the United States, and its inadequate response to a natural disaster, the Great Tohoku Earthquake. Unlike in Abe's first administration, the voters lost the opportunity to choose an alternative in elections. Furthermore, fragmentation among the opposition parties added to LDP's dominance in domestic politics.

In his second tenure, political instability and a worsened economic environment created deep economic downturn; all these negative economic events, however, provided Abe with a favorable political environment for his strong economic drive, Abenomics. Since Koizumi's retirement, multiple changes of prime ministers in a relatively short period interrupted economic reform. In particular, successive power shifts between the LDP and the DPJ discouraged economic recovery by preventing the government from promoting a coherent economic policy. In addition, the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 worsened the government's ability to spend heavily on social programs. Under this situation, Abe's new economic policy found a way to overcome the economic crisis with unprecedented monetary and fiscal stimulus. Whether Abe's economic policy seemed likely to be successful or not, it seemed difficult to imagine another economic option than Abenomics.

At the international level, Japan's relationships within its regional political environment provided Abe with relatively positive circumstances for developing his

security discourse. In particular, the U.S.-Japan alliance was a core element for expanding Japan's security capability. Traditionally, Japan's security capability evolved under the U.S.-Japan alliance, and its relations worsened during DPJ rule. The U.S.-Japan alliance, however, soon recovered and became much stronger under the second Abe administration, as Obama's Asia rebalancing strategy fit Abe's proactive pacifism diplomacy. By sharing economic, military, and ideological strategic benefits in the region with the United States, Abe was able to achieve substantial security policy advances. For example, during the 2014 U.S.-Japan summit, Abe reduced security concerns over the Senkaku Islands by the U.S. reassurance to defend Senkaku based on the U.S.-Japan Defense Treaty. Abe also complied with the U.S. Asia rebalancing strategy by modifying security bills. At this time, the U.S. government officially supported the Japanese cabinet decision of re-interpretation toward exercising the right of collective self-defense. Although the bill was controversial due to insufficient explanation by the cabinet, and it produced domestic backlash, Abe was able to overcome this political crisis with the combination of his political capital and support of the United States.

The power shift between China and Japan changed the Japanese perception of China, and Abe politically utilized Japanese nationalism in order to justify his security discourse. Although Japan overwhelmed China during the Cold War, under China's peaceful development strategy, Japan could not ignore China's rise in economic and military power in the region. China surpassed Japan in economic power and in military investment and modernization speed. In addition, Xi Jinping's assertive Chinese foreign policy has deepened Japanese security concerns in the region. Those Japanese security concerns were deepened by the 2012 Senkaku territorial dispute with China. In particular, the conflict deeply connected to national sovereignty and security interests such as strategic geopolitical benefits, including energy, resources, maritime and air space. These essential elements causing incompatible relations between the two countries gave people a sense of rivalry. As tensions within both countries increased, a rivalry sentiment among the people increased threat perception and strong nationalism. Senkaku nationalism encouraged strong cohesion between politicians and the public. Abe exploited this domestic sentiment in elections to expand and reproduce Japanese normalization

discourse. U.S.-Japan cooperation against China is also a strong pillar to support Abe's normalization trajectory. The combination of domestic nationalism and the U.S.-Japan alliance promotes a normalization movement related to rising China.

With the Korean Peninsula, primarily, Abe exploited North Korea's provocations as political justification to revise security policy. Already, in his time in the Koizumi cabinet, Abe had gained national popularity via the Japanese abduction issue. After Kim Jong-un took power as the successor to Kim Jong-il, regional uncertainty considerably increased. Abe's hard-line stance was maintained toward North Korea, as North Korea has been a serious security concern due to severe military challenges such as successive nuclear and ballistic missile tests. In reaction to these military threats, Abe gradually increased security policy initiatives such the new Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology, a change of former principles banning defense munitions exports sustained since the end of the WWII. Japan's relations with South Korea have been undermined due to chronic historical interpretation issues, although the bilateral relationship is significant for responding to North Korea crisis. Abe achieved a political settlement over the comfort women 2015, however. Abe was able to strengthen the trilateral relations of the U.S.-Japan-ROK and improve his own image to the global society as well.

This thesis suggests some implications for the future of Abe and normalization trajectory. It seems that Abe, domestically, will continue his political dominance. There seem to be no alternative politicians within the LDP or among the opposition parties exist to threaten Abe. The LDP is discussing extending Abe's presidency to 2021. The DP (the Democratic Party, the recently-adopted name of the former DPJ) still holds low approval ratings, although the public appears open to the new opposition party leader, Renho. Internationally, the political situation shows no sign of reversing its trajectory in Northeast Asia: competitive relations between the United States and China seem to be continuing in the region. North Korea's nuclear crisis is also at a standstill after the fifth nuclear test. Thus, the U.S.-Japan alliance will continue to accelerate the countries' close strategic relationship. Recently, Japan resumed talks with South Korea about military information-sharing, discussing a General Security of Military Information Agreement

(GSOMIA). This would be helpful for Abe to strengthen security dealing with nuclear and missile threats of North Korea.

Rather than external factors, Abe's persistent success will depend on his economic policy. Since Abe decided on a consumption tax increase, Abenomics did not show as great economic results as first expected. Japan's financial transparency worsened due to increased national debts, since the government has applied unprecedented fiscal and monetary policy during four years. The people have also questioned the three arrows of Abenomics economic reform, because Japan is entering an accelerating time of aging society and low birth rates. Still, Abe regards Abenomics as his top priority; therefore, his further political success is up to Abenomics in the long run.

Also, responding to the high desire of the Japanese public for economic restoration was a significant factor in determining the Prime Minister's flexibility in managing diverse internal and external affairs. From this view, for the future of Japan, the outcomes of economic restoration will be a significant factor for the regime and normalization trajectories as well. Considering his pragmatic approach during his second administration, for continuing success, it seems Abe will need to continue his pragmatism. By utilizing political events such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics to his advantage, Abe may be able to create a further favorable environment to develop security discourse.

At the present time, however, revision of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution is the most significant challenge for Abe. Since an amendment of Article 9 is considered Abe's lifework, Abe may approach the issue more cautiously. He has said that specific elements of the Constitution to be amended will be established through Diet and public debates, "which will deepen our understanding of the issue."<sup>259</sup> Recently, the Japanese Emperor's declaration of his intent to abdicate his throne has made the amendment of constitution discourse more complex.<sup>260</sup> Since the amendment of Article 9 is an extremely sensitive political matter, Abe may have no choice but to take a prudent

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<sup>259</sup> "Abe Makes Clear His Desire to Amend Pacifist Article 9," *The Asahi Shimbun*, 4 February 2016, [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind\\_news/politics/AJ201602040066](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201602040066).

<sup>260</sup> Smith, "US-Japan Relations: Hiroshima to Hague."

attitude. Postponing or abandoning revision of Article 9 might be one alternative, since Article 9 is strongly connected with Japanese protectiveness toward Constitution, an attitude that has held since the Constitution came into effect in 1947. Ultimately, how Abe approaches amending Article 9 seems to be most crucial; and in the process, Abe will need to pay careful attention to the trends of public opinion.

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